SUGGESTIONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

RELATIVE TO

HUMAN PERFECTION AND HAPPINESS.

DIDACTIC LECTURES.

VOL III.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR MESSRS. WHITE AND SON,
AT HORACE'S HEAD, FLEET-STREET,
MDCCXC.

BRITISH MUSEUM

CONTENTS

OF THE

THIRD VOLUME.

How a Man may and ſhould make Religion his Main Concern. p. 3
Sin conſidered as the Principal Source of Human Miſery. 35
Sin conſidered as the Principal Source of Human Miſery in regard to the Future State. 69
How a Man makes himſelf Partaker of other men's Sins. 109
The Duty of Brotherly Reprehenſions. 141
How every Man may and ought to labour at promoting the General Good. 177
Of Love towards God. 207
Of Love towards God, continued. 239
The Shortneſs and Troubles of Life. 273
Of the Future General Judgment. 301

[iii]

CONTENTS

OF THE

THIRD VOLUME.

How a Man may and should make Religion his Main Concern. P. 3

Sin considered as the Principal Source of Human Misery. 35

Sin considered as the Principal Source of Human Misery in regard to the Future State. 59

How a Man makes himself a Partaker of other men's Sins. 109

The Duty of Brotherly Reprehension. 141

How every Man may and ought to labour at promoting the General Good. 177

Of Love towards God. 207

Of Love towards God, continued. 239

The Shortness and Troubles of Life. 273

Of the Future General Judgment. 301

HOW

HOW A MAN MAY AND SHOULD MAKE RELIGION HIS MAIN CONCERN.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Matthew vi. 33.

HOW A MAN MAY AND SHOULD MAKE RELIGION HIS MAIN CONCERN.

YOU have often heard from your teachers, that a man ſhould make Religion and the ſalvation of his immortal ſoul his main concern, and poſtpone all others to it. In teaching and enjoining you this as your duty, we do no more than what our office demands. We lay no burden upon you which we might diſpenſe you from. We only thus recommend to you what is right, and good, and neceſſary in itſelf. We maintain a propoſition, the

truth of which we can always irrefragably demonſtrate. In the mean time, I think I can hardly be miſtaken in the opinion that ſometimes occurs to me, that this manner of delivering and enforcing it, appears to you, at times, ſtrange and importunate. It has often occured to me, as if I heard many of you, otherwiſe well diſpoſed, exclaim, But it is not requiring of us an impoſſible thing, to expect that we ſhould make Religion our moſt material concern? We have a high veneration for Religion, we are not indifferent to our ſalvation. We are much diſpoſed to do all that God requires of us for obtaining it, whenever it is in our power; and is it poſſible for God to require any thing of us which we cannot perform? But how is it poſſible for us to be continually thinking of Religion, continually to be employed in Religion, continually to be providing for our ſalvation? We have a calling in the world, and to this calling we muſt devote the greateſt part of

our

our time, the greateſt part of our attention, the greateſt part of our powers. A clergyman, indeed, may eaſily make Religion his main concern; and he ought to do ſo. But we purſue a quite different mode of life; we have quite other employments and affairs than he. Theſe objections are doubtleſs ſpecious enough. I will even allow that they may at times diſturb very honeſt minds. But they cannot ſtand out againſt a cloſer examination. The light of truth will ſoon diſperſe them. They proceed merely from wrong notions of the ſubject in queſtion. When a man repreſents it to himſelf as it actually is, he directly finds, that God requires nothing impoſſible of us, and that even we, his miniſters, do not carry his commands to exceſs. He immediately finds, that one and the ſame law is given, and the ſame duties enjoined, to the clergyman, and to him who is no clergyman, in this as in moſt other reſpects; and that they both may obſerve this law and fulfill theſe duties, if they be but earneſtly

intentioned to do ſo. For convincing you of this, I ſhall now endeavour, under the divine bleſſing and help, to ſhew you, with all poſſible plainneſs and ſimplicity:

How a man may and ought to make Religion his main concern, and how advantageous it is to do ſo.

When we fully ſee this, we ſhall likewiſe immediately underſtand, what our Saviour requires of us, by exhorting us to ſeek firſt, or principally, and before all things, the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs. How fortunate ſhall I eſteem myſelf, if by this conſideration of Religion, which is ſolely intended to make us wiſe, and virtuous, and happy, I may be the means of gaining over ſome hearts, and of confirming in their noble diſpoſitions ſuch as are already addicted to it, and are happy in the practice of it, and elevate to them the ſentiment of their own felicity. O God,

let

let it pleaſe thee, to bleſs my diſcourſe in this deſign. Let the truth be victorious over prejudice and opinion, and our lives diſplay the proper fruits of this glorious conqueſt!

To make Religion our main concern does not imply, to think of nothing elſe but Religion, to be employed in nothing elſe but Religion, to apply all our time, all our faculties, or even the greateſt part of them, in ſuch conſiderations, converſations, and devotional exerciſes, as immediately belong to Religion, and for them to neglect and poſtpone all others. Were we to repreſent this to you as your duty, we ſhould certainly require more of you than you are able to perform; more than God himſelf requires at your hands. But neither is this the ſignification of the expreſſion, to make any thing our main concern. This expreſſion implies nothing elſe but this: to concern oneſelf much more about

ſome certain matter than about all others; to turn one's thoughts more frequently and more readily that way than any other; never to loſe it totally out of ſight; to do all the reſt in reference to this, and on its account; and to be ready, whenever it is neceſſary, to ſacrifice all others to it. A few examples, drawn from ſuch things as do not peculiarly relate to Religion, will beſt explain this matter. Suppoſe a ſcholar ſhould make ſome particular branches of a ſcience his main concern, or the ſolution of ſome certain problem, in hiſtory, in medicine, in natural philoſophy, or the like, for the ſake of ſhedding ſome more light on the obſcurer regions of the kingdom of truth. Does this of courſe imply, that he thinks ſolely and conſtantly with the cloſeſt attention on this matter? that he deſpiſes, neglects, omits, whatever does not directly conduct him to the knowledge of it? By no means: but it implies, that he never loſes it ſo far out of ſight, as wittingly and wilfully

wilfully to omit any thing that may be of ſervice to him in the attainment of it. He certainly attends with due application to the affairs of his calling; he performs, he hears, he treats of innumerable things, which ſtand in no particular relation with the ſucceſſion of ideas and concluſions after which he is ſtriving, and are often at a diſtance from them: but he nevertheleſs frequently and intenſely meditates on that which he makes his main concern; ſince he has it very much at his heart, every thing in a manner puts him in mind of it; the particular connection it has with it never eſcapes his attention; he applies, as it were, every thing to it, for trying whether it may not give him ſome light in his purſuit, whether it may not lead him to the traces of what he is ſeeking. In this manner is he concerned about it, at the very time he is employed in a hundred of other affairs, and is always haſtening to the mark he ſees before him.

Or,

Or, to make this ſtill more comprehenſible, ſuppoſe another has a certain project that relates to his temporal welfare, and makes the proſecution of this plan his main concern. He is determined, for example, to obtain a certain preferment, ſome poſt of honour, or ſome lucrative office, which probably he cannot expect to enjoy till after a lapſe of a number of years. This is now become his principal care. What now does that imply? Is it as much as to ſay: He now abandons the calling, he has hitherto followed, relinquiſhes all the advantages and affairs he has hitherto had; he neglects all the duties of his preſent ſtation and office; he thinks merely of the poſt of honour, on the preferment after which he is ſtriving? Certainly not. But it is as much as to ſay: He even now directs his behaviour in conformity to the views he has. He omits much, he does much, which he ſhould neither omit nor do, if he had not this project in view. The

pleaſing proſpect he keeps before him encourages him to execute with ſtrict fidelity the affairs entruſted to him by the community, that they may be induced hereafter to truſt him with more; and worthily to fill the ſtation he already occupies, that by ſo doing he may prepare the way to one ſtill higher. This hope incites him, on all fit occaſions, to cultivate the favour and friendſhip of thoſe who may any way contribute to the furtherance of his aims, and never to do any thing that may reaſonably give them offence. It prompts him to remove all impediments out of the way that may render the attainment of his deſign difficult or impoſſible to him. In ſhort, he frequently thinks of his future elevation or requiſites even in the midſt of his affairs, in the midſt of the labours of his calling; he often tranſports himſelf, in thought, into his new ſituation; he already unobſervedly adopts the manners that are convenient to it; and rejoices by anticipation in the advantages that are connected

nected with it. This is called making any thing one's main concern, one's moſt important object. And the expreſſion has the very ſame ſignification in reference to Religion.

To make Religion the main concern, implies, therefore, firſt, to be thoroughly impreſſed with the importance and excellency of it; and not only to ſay, but likewiſe to ſee and to feel that far more depends on the perſpicuous knowledge of Religion, on the firm belief of it, on obedience to its precepts, on the enjoyment of its comforts, and on becoming capable and worthy of its rewards, than on every thing beſides which otherwiſe deſerves our attention and eſteem. It implies, with the moſt perfect ſincerity, to take up the language of the Pſalmiſt, when he ſays: "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" if I do but know thee, my God; if I be but aſſured of thy grace and good-pleaſure; if I do but think on

on thee with a chearful heart, and truſt in thee with a well-grounded confidence; Lord, if I thus have but thee, "there is nothing in heaven or on earth that I deſire in compariſon of thee!" It implies, to believe firmly, that he alone is truly wiſe and happy, who underſtands and practiſes Religion, who ſo thinks and judges and acts as Religion requires we ſhould think and judge and act; and that no human ſcience, no wealth, no honour, no power, can compenſate the want of the advantages it may procure us both in the preſent and the future world. And when once a man is thus diſpoſed towards Religion, will he not readily do all he can for being better acquainted with its doctrines, its commands, its conſolations, and for obtaining a fuller aſſurance of the truth, the reaſonableneſs and the excellency of it? Will he not readily uſe all the means of public and private inſtruction, and rejoice in them more, if he enlarges his knowledge of God and di-

vine

vine concerns, ſtrengthens his faith, exalts his aptitude to goodneſs, than in the accumulation of temporal goods, or in procuring his ſenſes a tranſient pleaſure? He, therefore, who does not this; he who contents himſelf with a dry and barren knowledge, with a fluctuating faith; who catches with avidity at every pretext for diſpenſing with the practices of Religion; who does not know, and does not ſeek, the pleaſure and delight that are attendant on the due obſervance of them: of him it certainly cannot be ſaid, that he makes Religion his main concern, his moſt important buſineſs, or that he ſeeks firſt and principally the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs. No! he makes a pure bye-work of it, which he poſtpones to all others, and is never employed in it but when he cannot eaſily avoid it, or when certain times and circumſtances mechanically call him to it.

To

To make Religion the main concern, implies, ſecondly, to bear in mind, on all occaſions, in buſineſs as well as in worſhip, in company as well as in retirement, in the world as well as in church, the doctrines, the commands, and the promiſes of Religion; and to conſider and judge of every thing that we do, or that happens to us, in the relation wherein it ſtands to Religion and our everlaſting ſalvation. For this to be the caſe, a man muſt make himſelf ſo intimately acquainted with theſe doctrines, with theſe commands, with theſe promiſes, that they ſhall preſent themſelves, as it were, without ſtudious reflection to his mind, that they be ever before him. This however cannot be, if he do not occupy himſelf in theſe matters in the ſilent hours of retirement; if he do not there learn to apply the general doctrines and precepts of Religion to his own particular circumſtances, and thereby prepare himſelf for all events that may happen to him at other times. He who

who does this, who does it frequently and with pleaſure, will never, even in the noiſe and hurry of the world, ſo far loſe ſight of Religion, but that every thing will lead him to it, and excite pious ſentiments and feelings in him. Do his affairs go on with ſucceſs; do ſuch occurrences offer, as are uſeful to him or his, in a greater or leſſer degree: he aſcribes this good fortune to the all-ruling providence of the Moſt High; he greatfully receives it as a free-gift of his bounty; he reſents his friendlineſs in the chearful enjoyment of it; and feels a new zeal within him to love this bountiful God, and to obey him from motives of gratitude and affection. On the contrary, does ſome adverſe event befal him; are his projects defeated; are his endeavours without effect: he confeſſes and adores, even here, the will of Him who preſides over all ſupreme, and whoſe government is exempt from blame. Does he meet with hardſhips in the honeſt diſcharge of his duties;

does

does he ſee perils before him which he cannot avoid; his heart aſcends to the Almighty, his Father and God; in confidence in his ſupport, he advances to theſe difficulties, and encounters theſe dangers, convinced that the man who is faithful to his duties muſt at length be happy in the kingdom of a wiſe and righteous God. Does he perceive ignorant, vicious, miſerable men in the world; Religion repleniſhes his heart with the moſt active compaſſion towards them; he praiſes his merciful Father in heaven for the unmerited advantages he has above them; and ſends up ardent wiſhes to the throne of grace, for their illumination, their amendment, and their deliverance. Does he ſee ſinners and fools, who act wickedly without remorſe, and yet ſeem to be happy; Religion calls him to conſider the end of theſe men, teaches him to diſtinguiſh appearances from reality, and warns him not to ſuffer his virtue and piety to be diſturbed at the ſight. And ſo in a

hundred other examples. He who makes Religion his main concern, is led by all things to it, is reminded of its doctrines, its commands, and its comforts; he conſiders all things in the light that diffuſes itſelf abroad over him and all around him.

To make Religion the main concern, implies, thirdly, conſtantly to maintain the pious and virtuous mind with which we are inſpired by Religion, and to let it appear in the whole of our conduct. And what is this mind? It is the mind which was alſo in Jeſus. It is the ſincere and predominant deſire to pleaſe God and to do his will; it is the earneſt and ever-active deſire to reſemble Chriſt our Saviour, and thereby to become ſuſceptible of the bliſs he has promiſed us. If, therefore, you earneſtly hope in this reſpect to do the will of God and to pleaſe him, to follow your temporal calling with fidelity and diligence, and conſcientiouſly to decline all injuſtice,

all

all deceit, all circumvention in your dealings with your neighbour in it; if you preſerve the ſentiment of the omnipreſence and the omniſcience of God, even then when you could practiſe thoſe arts without danger of being puniſhed, or diſgraced, or detected by mankind; if the idea that it it is God who has placed you in the ſtation where you are, yields you courage and firmneſs to endure with patience every diſagreeableneſs and difficulty that is connected with it, and chearfully to execute all the buſineſſes it engages you in, becauſe God requires that you ſhould tranſact them; if, with a prudent and continued induſtry to promote your happineſs and that of others, you leave to Divine Providence the iſſue of your endeavours, and even then to be ſatisfied with it when it does not tally with your wiſhes, becauſe you know and believe that it is conſiſtent with the views and the will of your God, and is conſequently right and good; if you do your neighbour the

offices of humanity, of complaiſance, and kindneſs, not from ſelf-intereſt, not from ambition, not from conſtraint, but ſolely becauſe you love him as your brother according to the precept of the Goſpel, becauſe you know that God has commended him to your affection, your ſolicitude and your aſſiſtance, becauſe you perceive and feel that nothing is more exalted than to copy after God in his univerſal and unwearied beneficence, and to reſemble Jeſus, that amiable, that godlike friend of man; if you thus conſtantly think and act, thus conſtantly practiſe Religion; you actually demonſtrate that you have made it your main concern, your moſt important buſineſs, though you beſtow your attention likewiſe on a hundred other matters, and are employed in a hundred other affairs; becauſe you at all times preſerve the pious and Chriſtian mind, and demean yourſelf conſiſtently with the pious and Chriſtian diſpoſitions Religion ſhould inſpire.

To

To make Religion the main concern, laſtly, implies, always to give the preference to Religion in all caſes, where a man muſt either tranſgreſs the precepts of Religion, or renounce and deny himſelf other things. It implies, to avoid and relinquiſh without heſitation, whatever cannot conſiſt with the fear of God, with real virtue and ſincere devotion. If, therefore, the world ſhews me means of becoming rich and great, and Religion forbids me the uſe of theſe means, as being unjuſt and detrimental to my neighbour; then muſt I reject the means with abhorrence. If I make Religion my main concern, and rather chuſe to remain poor and little than ſeek to become rich and great by violating its injunctions and by forfeiting its comforts: If the world invite me to pleaſures, againſt which I am warned by Religion, becauſe they debaſe my ſoul, corrupt my taſte, or are ſcandalous and offenſive to my fellow-creatures; then muſt I, if I make Religion

my main concern, avoid theſe unpermitted pleaſures, and rather do violence to my fleſh and blood, to my corrupted nature, than expoſe myſelf to the danger of diſpleaſing God. If an opportunity preſent itſelf to revenge me on my enemies, to retaliate evil with evil, and Religion call out to me: "Avenge not thyſelf; love thy enemy; do him good; imitate thy Father in heaven, thy magnanimous Redeemer:" then muſt I, if I make Religion my main concern, follow her voice without delay, and ſtifle every rancorous thought in its birth. If my circumſtances, my affairs, my connexions with others, allure me to lead a too diſſipated life, and to paſs the greateſt part of the time my vocation leaves me, though not in groſs ſins and exceſſes, but yet in worthleſs trifles, in childiſh diverſions and amuſements; and Religion ſay to me, "By this means thou wilt never get forward in knowledge and virtue; by this means thou wilt enervate by degrees the good ſenti-

ments

ments and aptitudes thou haſt already acquired, and at length totally loſe them; by this means it will be impoſſible for thee to fulfill the vocation of a Chriſtian, and to become capable of the ſupreme felicity that awaits the Chriſtian in the other world:" then muſt I, if I make Religion my main concern, employ my leiſure better; and though I need not retire from all innocent ſocieties and pleaſures, yet muſt I take care that the exerciſes of private devotion receive no injury from them. I muſt prefer reflection, prayer, ſelf-examination, and meditation on the divine commands, to every kind of paſtime. The ſolemn hours in which my ſoul is buſied with herſelf, with God, and with futurity, muſt to me be hours of the choiceſt recreation, of the ſweeteſt pleaſure. This, this is what is implied by making Religion one's main concern; this is the ſignification of ſeeking firſt, and eſpecially, the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs; this is what God, this

is what our real happineſs requires; and he who thinks theſe demands exorbitant, and holds the obſervance of them to be impracticable, is ſtill far, very far from the kingdom of God.

Happy the man who knows theſe things, and acts according to his knowledge. The advantages it will procure him are no leſs various than great. We can now only notice them in a curſory manner.

He that makes Religion his main concern, has her for the ſafeſt guide, conducting him in all his ways, the wiſeſt and moſt faithful counſellor, never forſaking him in the moſt trying events. She inſtructs him at all times in his duties, and how he ſhall beſt acquit himſelf of them. She warns him of all that may be injurious to his ſoul and prejudicial to his eternal ſalvation. She ays open to him the hidden ſnares in which the world and his own heart are endeavouring

ing to take him. She inſpires him with boldneſs when he is called to fight againſt ſin, and gives him ſo much force and vigour, in all the diſtruſt he has in himſelf, by her doctrines and promiſes, that he is bent upon conquering all things, and is able to perſevere to the end. So long as he adheres to her, and follows her wiſe ſuggeſtions, ſo long he walks an even path, and cannot fail of the glorious prize after which he ſtrives.

He that makes Religion his main concern is farther entitled to all her divine conſolations, and fully taſtes the ſweetneſs of them. The ſolid motives ſhe gives us to patience, to contentedneſs, to confidence, and to hope, are ever before him. Ere trouble is ſtrong enough to conquer his heart, and to ſhed darkneſs and terrors about it, Religion has cheared him already with her light, and opened to him ſuch delightful proſpects into futurity, as to make

it

it impoſſible for him, yes, I do not indulge in too ſtrong expreſſions, as to make it impoſſible for him to give himſelf up to dejection, or ſink into remedileſs deſpondency and ſorrow. What a privilege then has he in this reſpect who makes Religion his main purſuit, over him who only occaſionally follows after her, and never flies to her ſanctuary but in the time of diſtreſs! By the former ſhe conſtantly ſtands as his faithful friend; ſhe offers him freely her help, her ſupport, her conſolations, as ſoon as he needs them, of her own accord. He knows, he underſtands, her gentle voice; he has often already experienced her force; he knows that he may truſt to her ſupport; and before he can fall, before he can ſink, ſhe holds him up by his right-hand, and places his feet upon a rock. To the latter, on the contrary, to him who purſues Religion as a bye-affair, and only flees to her ſanctuary in time of need, ſhe is diſtant and reſerved. He has indeed heard that

ſhe can help mankind, reſtore and conſole them, when evil befalls them; but he is not intimately enough connected with her, for promiſing himſelf this aſſiſtance, this reſtoration, this comfort from her. He has made her cool towards him by the indifferency he has ſhewn her in the time of his proſperity. He muſt now only ſue to her as to a neglected and affronted friend; he muſt firſt gain an intimacy with her; he muſt be contented to hear bitter reproaches from her; he muſt bear with her complaints of him as the author of his own misfortunes; and frequently abide long in ſuſpenſe between fear and hope, ere ſhe will ſpeak to him of peace, and grant him the comfort of the promiſes of God. Nay, it not unfrequently happens, that, after he has long diſregarded her, he will have to forego all her comforts, and experience the truth of that terrible menace: "Becauſe I have called, and ye refuſed; I have ſtretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but

ye

ye have ſet at nought all my counſel, and would none of my reproof; I alſo will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh."

In fine, the man who makes Religion his main concern, is at all times in ſuch a frame, that he may reaſonably promiſe himſelf the eternal felicity, an entrance into the heavenly kingdom of God. He is at all times prepared to exchange this world for the next, and needs not be afraid of loſing any thing by that exchange. Let Providence call him ſuddenly hence, or death approach him in tedious ſteps, his moſt important affairs are already adjuſted. His mind need not firſt be altered before he is fitted for a better and more perfect ſtate. He already thinks and judges in regard to the moſt eſſential matters, as the bleſſed in heaven think of them and judge. He now acts on the principles that are current there; he underſtands and loves the plea-

ſures

ſures here, the only pleaſures which there are underſtood and loved. Quite different is the caſe with him who in the day of proſperity has loſt ſight of Religion, who coldly purſues it as a ſlight affair, and defers to ſeek the kingdom of God till the concluding days of his life. On their arrival he ſees theſe things in their full importance; now will he make them his main concern. Now he is anxious for inſtruction and comfort. Now he exclaims with the Pſalmiſt: "Lord, whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I deſire in compariſon of thee!" Now he ſends for the teacher of Religion. He is to bring her conſolations to him. He is to prepare him for death, and fit him for admiſſion to the kingdom of God. What a demand! We are to comfort a man who has never hitherto beſtowed any pains on the duties of Religion, who has contemned her moſt ſacred injunctions, and violated them on ſettled deſign; we are to conſole him

him with her glorious promiſes. Can we do it without deluding him with futile hopes, and wounding our conſcience? In a few days, in a few hours, we are to change him into quite another man, give him quite another mind, direct his deſires and his taſte to quite other objects. Is this probable? Is this poſſible? Or has God any where promiſed, that, by the miniſtration of his word, and by the teachers of it, he will perform ſuch miracles on the ſick and the dying? No; he who in his life-time will not make Religion his main concern, has but little conſolation and help to expect from her when lying on his bed of death. He who in his better days does not conſider and treat the ſeeking of the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs as the moſt important concern of man, runs the greateſt hazard of being excluded from that heavenly kingdom, though at the end of his life he be never ſo ſolicitous about it.

What

What then ſhall we do? On what ſhall we determine? Shall we ſtill regard and proſecute Religion and the care of our eternal ſalvation with negligence, with coldneſs and indifference, as many, as probably the greateſt part of us, have hitherto done? Shall we ſtill make a mere bye-work of theſe moſt important of all affairs, on which we are only to think, and in which we are only to be occupied, when we know not which way elſe to turn, or when we are diven to it by ſome particular ſolemnities, by misfortunes and tribulations, or by the dread of death? Shall we ſtill be ſo ſenſeleſs, as to employ ourſelves in concerns which we can never neglect without prejudice, which are neceſſary, uſeful, and comfortable to us at all times and in all places, only at ſtated times and in certain places, and thus loſe all the profit they might procure us? For this is certain, either we muſt make Religion our main concern, in the manner above laid down,

down, and allow ourſelves to be conſtantly actuated, governed, and conducted by her, or we have no benefit from her to expect. And we ſhould now bethink ourſelves how we will determine, what party we will eſpouſe?—Divine Religion, heavenly Inſtructreſs, thou beſt, thou only Comforter in life and death! thee will we venerate as the moſt precious gift of the mercy of our God; to thy counſels, to thy conduct, we will chearfully ſubmit; thy commands alone we will readily obey; thy ſpirit ſhall conſtantly inſpire and animate ours. Come—fix thy dwelling in our hearts; enlighten them with thy light; kindle there the fire of love towards God and Chriſt; repleniſh them with wiſdom and virtue; and give us to experience, that thy ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, that thy paths are happineſs and peace!

SIN

SIN

CONSIDERED AS

THE PRINCIPAL SOURCE

OF

HUMAN MISERY.

Deſtruction ſhall be to the workers of iniquity.
Prov. x. 29.

SIN

CONSIDERED AS

THE PRINCIPAL SOURCE

OF

HUMAN MISERY.

NOTHING is more common than for men to lament the various evils that are met with in the world, and to reckon themſelves extremely unhappy. Nay, nothing is more common than for them to lay the blame of their unhappineſs upon God, and to charge him with a want of kindneſs, or to accuſe him with a mean partiality. What injuſtice! Does not all nature teſtify, do not all the arrange-

ments God has made in nature teſtify, do not all the capacities and powers he has granted us plainly teſtify, that he is ſupremely good, that he loves his creatures like a father, that he has not formed them for miſery but for happineſs, and that he has not allowed them to be defective in any neceſſary means for becoming partakers of it? But, ſays the diſſatisfied man, the man that takes up the controverſy with his Maker, whence come then the evils, which do not therefore the leſs exiſt, and which make us feel their preſſure too ſenſibly to permit us to doubt of their reality? They proceed almoſt all from thyſelf, O man, whoſoever thou art that complaineſt of them. They proceed from thy corrupt and vicious manners, from the ſins and follies thou committeſt, from the irregularities and exceſſes in which thou indulgeſt, from the miſuſe thou makeſt of thy talents and endowments. Thou complaineſt of a deficiency of happineſs; and ſtill obſtinately refuſeſt

fuſeſt to ſtrike into the only certain path that leads thee to it; or ſuffereſt thyſelf to be diſmayed at the firſt difficulties, on entering it, thou muſt have to encounter. Thou complaineſt of the miſery that bears hard upon thee; and yet continueſt to walk a way, of which Reaſon, Religion, and Experience inform us, that the man who purſues it cannot but be miſerable. What contradiction! When will mankind, inſtead of complaining, rather ſet themſelves to work to remove the cauſes of their complaints? When will they, inſtead of making happineſs a mere object of their wiſhes, earneſtly employ the means for attaining it they have in their power? When will they learn to know that virtue alone can render us truly happy, and ſin or vice alone make us wretched? Yes; ſin, as the wiſe king aſſures us, is the deſtruction of its votaries. It is an expreſſion completely warranted by fact, and the juſtice of it we may perceive without much trouble, and with full con-

viction, as ſoon as we reflect upon it, and compare it with the experience of ourſelves and others. To aſſiſt you in theſe reflections and in this compariſon, is the deſign of my preſent diſcourſe; and I am deſirous of nothing more, than that the ſentiment of ſin, as the ſource of all evil, as what renders us truly wretched, may be ſtrongly felt by you at all times, whenever you ſhall be tempted to think, or to ſpeak, or to commit any thing bad. In a view to this ſalutary effect, and for convincing you that ſin is the prime cauſe of all human miſery, I ſhall explain and demonſtrate four propoſi tions.

The firſt is: Sin brings a great many evils on man, from which, were he virtuous, he would be totally free.

The next is: Sin puts a man out of the condition to render eaſy and tolerable thoſe evils which he cannot wholly avoid.

The

The third is: Sin prevents him from the full enjoyment of the good which not only counterbalances, but far outweighs the evil in the world, or of finding that happineſs in the enjoyment of it, which, were he virtuous, he might find therein, and which, in that caſe, would ſupply the want of ſo many other things, and bear him harmleſs from ſo many evils.

The fourth and laſt is: Sin incapacitates a man for the ſtate of pure and perfect happineſs which awaits the righteous in the world to come, and in compariſon whereof all the hardſhips and afflictions of the preſent time come into no conſideration whatever.

Four propoſitions which put it out of all manner of doubt, that ſin is man's deſtruction. The three former ſhall make the ſubject of our preſent diſquiſition; the fourth, on account of its peculiar impor-

tance, we will leave to be agitated on ſome other occaſion.

I ſay, firſt, then, that Sin brings a great many evils on man, from which, were he virtuous, he would be totally free. Here belong the generality of maladies and pains, a decayed body, a wounded and avenging conſcience, a reſtleſs and diſcontented heart, remorſe and ſhame in regard to the paſt, vexation and diſguſt in the preſent, and trouble and affright with reſpect to the future. What dreadful evils! Are they not the greateſt we can meet with here on earth? And whence proceed theſe evils? Can we ſay with truth that they are unavoidable? Has not God in Nature and Religion made the wiſeſt inſtitutions againſt them? Has he not given us, as men and as Chriſtians, the ſureſt preſervatives from them? And is it not merely our own fault, if we do not uſe theſe means, or not uſe them aright, and are therefore reduced to

ſigh

ſigh under theſe evils?—O you, who ſo often and ſo bitterly complain of it, who ſo readily ſeek the cauſe of it without you, which lies in yourſelves alone, do but quit the ſervice of Sin and Vice, do but follow the precepts of Wiſdom and Virtue; and the greateſt part of theſe evils, and with them your complaints, will vaniſh away. Subdue your diſorderly paſſions; learn to govern yourſelves; lead a temperate, a laborious, a ſimple, a natural life; eat and drink, not for pleaſing your palate, but for ſtilling your hunger and thirſt; attend to your calling with a quiet mind, free from all anxious and needleſs cares; acquire the compoſed temper, the chearful repoſe, of the Sage and the Chriſtian: ſo will you be unacquainted with the generality of pains; ſo will you even ſtrengthen the feeble body you may probably have received from your parents, and reach the end of your life without violent ſufferings. Be faithful to your duty; do, at all times

and

and in all places, what you judge to be right and good according to your beſt diſcernment; revere the commands of your conſcience as the commands of God: ſo will you keep it unhurt; ſo will it make you no reproaches; ſo will its approbation perpetually attend and reward you. Set bounds to your deſires; direct them ſolely to real, noble, and laſting goods; learn to diſtinguiſh the reaſonable and eaſy demands of Nature, from the ſevere and oppreſſive laws of Pomp, and Luxury, and Covetouſneſs, and Faſhion; and ſeek to ſatisfy thoſe, regardleſs of theſe; eſteem every thing according to what it actually is, and not according to the value ſet upon it by the world; ſeek your honour and your happineſs, not in the judgment that others paſs on you and your condition, but in the judgment that Truth and God himſelf pronounce upon you: ſo will peace, ſatisfaction, and tranquillity take up their abode in your heart, and even then not quit it when your outward circumſtances undergo

any

any alteration whatever. Live wiſely; live virtuouſly; apply your time, your abilities, your goods, to the will of God, and to the benefit of your brethren; call yourſelf frequently to account; let no day paſs by in which you have done nothing uſeful and good: ſo will you look backward without confuſion; ſo will you look with pleaſure on the paſt, and need not be aſhamed of your younger years. Prefer the pleaſures of the mind and heart, the pleaſure of virtuous friendſhip, the pleaſure of beneficence, to all ſenſual tranſports; and ſhun the childiſh amuſements and paſtimes, the tumultuous diverſions of worldly men, who abhor reflection, and are deſtitute of feelings to what is beautiful and good: ſo will alſo the preſent cauſe you neither languor nor diſguſt, and your pleaſures will be as diverſified as real. Conciliate to yourſelf, in fine, by a devout and holy life, the loving-kindneſs of God, who hereafter will be your judge; by good works lay up treaſures

which

which wax not old, but will follow you into the eternal kingdom; faithfully employ the talent which God has committed to you; put it out to uſe, and ſtrive conſtantly ſo to live as befits men who are to live for ever: ſo will the future not be terrible to you; ſo will it bring you no puniſhment, no miſery, but the moſt glorious recompenſe.

And what is it now that hinders you from following theſe maxims of Wiſdom, and thereby removing that hoſt of evils of which the world complains? It is ſin that brings deſtruction; it brings on a numerous and hideous train of pains and diſeaſes; it has remorſe of conſcience, cares, diſquietudes, ſhame, compunction, vexation, trouble, and fear, for its attendants. Or, is it not intemperance in eating and drinking, licentiouſneſs in ſenſual pleaſures, exceſſive enjoyment; is it not the violence of headſtrong paſſions, the fury of petulance

lance and anger, the conſuming fire of hatred and revenge, the corroding fretfulneſs of jealouſy and envy, that deſtroy our bodies, exhauſt its powers, and diffuſe a mortal poiſon in our veins, which load it in the prime of life with infirmities and pains, and hurry it into an untimely grave? Is it not the conſciouſneſs of our ſins and delinquencies, the conſciouſneſs of duty deſignedly neglected, or of the wrongs committed knowingly and wilfully againſt our neighbour; the conſciouſneſs of having acted fooliſhly, unreaſonably, unmercifully, meanly, or having otherwiſe offended God and our neighbour? is it not this conſciouſneſs that darts its ſtings into the very inmoſt receſſes of the ſoul, that torments us with unſpeakable anguiſh, that purſues us with reproaches into all our haunts, that rings in our ears a peal that cannot be ſtifled by the loudeſt, the moſt tumultuous diverſions? Is it not our extravagant and inſatiable deſires after riches, and honour,

and power, and voluptuouſneſs, which kindle oppoſition and ſtrife in our heart, which diveſt of its worth what we actually have, which prevent us in its full enjoyment, and which debar us from the way of ſatisfaction and content? And what is it that frequently renders our retroſpect ſo full of remorſe and horror? Is it not the recollection of the follies by which we have degraded ourſelves? the irrevocable time we have loſt? the powers and capacities we have miſapplied? the advantages we have neglected? the damages we have brought on ourſelves and others? What is it that renders the preſent heavy and diſguſting to us? Is it not our vitiated and perverted taſte, unfitted for all nobler and more refined pleaſures? Is it not the beſotted obſtinacy with which we ſeek felicity where it abſolutely cannot be found? Is it not the weariſome and vain endeavour after fugacious ſhadows, which we can never catch? Is it not the

the ſlaviſh ſhackles in which we ſuffer ourſelves to be bound, by cuſtom, by faſhion, by the fear of ridicule? What is it, finally, that renders the future terrifying to us? Is it not the ſubſtantial concern at loſing all things in death, and at being unable to ſtand the final judgment? Is it not the idea of the horrid conſequences, the grievous puniſhments that follow in that other world on an irregular and miſ-ſpent life? Is it not the ſad reflections on having a God, againſt whom we have rebelled, for our rigorous judge, and on being excluded from his heavenly kingdom? If you cannot deny all this, then it remains a certain truth, that man, were he wiſe and virtuous, would be totally exempt from moſt of the evils, and thoſe the moſt ſenſible, he meets with here on earth; and that conſequently ſin, his deſtruction, is the principal ſource of his unhappineſs.

II. It

II. It is not ſo, however, only in this, but alſo in other reſpects. It incapacitates him for alleviating and rendering tolerable thoſe evils, which, even by a wiſe and virtuous conduct, he could not totally avoid. And this is the ſecond propoſition I have to elucidate. It is certain, that we may, and often actually do, meet with many evils here on earth, without our fault. The principle of our bodily weakneſs may lie in its original frame, or in our earlieſt education, which was independent on our choice. We may, though adhering to the ſtricteſt moderation, be afflicted with habitual or other diſtempers; we may even bring them upon us by duteous and beneficent actions. The moſt unſullied virtue is not always ſecure againſt the ſhafts of ſlander and malice. The moſt generous actions may make perſons of leſs generous ſentiments become our perſecutors and foes. The moſt aſſiduous induſtry cannot always ſecure us from want. The moſt prudent

prudent and honeſt undertakings will often be fruſtrated by little, unavoidable accidents. That which ought to redound to our honour, may frequently be the cauſe why others deſpiſe us; and that which we prize among the deareſt of our earthly goods may, without our fault, be raviſhed from us. Frequently in this reſpect one event happens alike to the juſt and to the unjuſt. But how different is the manner in which they regard and ſuſtain it! How light it is to the one; how hard, how inſupportable to the other! Is the juſt man called to forego or to loſe certain outward advantages; yet he has many other far greater and more eſſential goods, which richly compenſate this privation or loſs. His happineſs depends not ſo much on outward things, as on his juſt and generous way of thinking, on his Chriſtian and heavenly mind, on the good frame of his heart. He has a quiet conſcience, a placable and gracious God, and the certain

hope of a better world. He believes and adores a wiſe and benign Providence, conſtantly watching over him, which knows and loves him, which makes all things, whether good or evil, work together for his benefit. His hope is not built on tranſitory riches, not on the favour of mortal men, not on his own infirmity, but on the living and eternal God, who never will let it be put to confuſion. Animated by this confidence, inſpired by this hope, he may ſay, whatever befall him: "The Lord gave; the Lord hath taken away: bleſſed be the name of the Lord!" Quite other is the caſe with the man who abides under the dominion of ſin and vice, even though the misfortunes he meets with ariſe not immediately from his faulty behaviour, but proceed from other cauſes. He feels the burden of them in all its preſſure; it ſinks him to the earth, becauſe he is deſtitute of the ſupports of confidence and hope. Since he ſeeks his happineſs in external, ſenſible things alone, the want or the loſs of them muſt

muſt neceſſarily be extremely diſtreſſing to him, and muſt often appear irreparable. Has he ſo much ſentiment of Religion left as to enable him to lift up his eyes to a ſuperior being, under the evils he meets with; yet can he not perceive in them the chaſtening hand of an affectionate father, but is forced to confeſs them the deſerved puniſhment of an offended ſovereign, and a provoked judge; he muſt dread the more terrible effects of his righteous diſpleaſure. The afflictions that come upon him, are to him no ſchool of virtue and devotion, for his diſcipline in the harder duties of Chriſtianity, and for preparing him for a higher ſtate. They hurry him rather into every exceſs of complaint, of impatience, of infidelity, of deſpair; they harden him in his haughty and untractable temper; they often ſeduce him to injuſtice, to cruelty, to low and unworthy actions; and all this muſt of neceſſity make them far more grievous than they would be to him, if he might venture to

appropriate to himſelf the ſupport of wiſdom and virtue, the protection and favour of the Almighty, and the comforts of Religion. Conſequently, ſin is alſo in this reſpect his deſtruction, the principal ſource of his unhappineſs.

III. This is not all. Sin prevents a man, and this is my third propoſition, ſin prevents a man from fully enjoying the good which not only counterbalances, but far outweighs the evil in the world, or from finding the happineſs in it, which, if he were virtuous, he might, and which then would compenſate the want of ſo many other things, and bear him harmleſs from ſo many hardſhips and evils. Are there many, and great evils in the world; yet are there far more goods. But for ſeeing this good, for feeling its value, for taſting the whole of its ſweets, we muſt have a wiſe, a virtuous, a pious heart. In various and rich ſources of pleaſure and happineſs,

our good Creator has not left us deficient even in the preſent ſtate; but the preſent ſtate is deficient in men who underſtand how properly to uſe theſe ſources of pleaſure and happineſs; and it is ſin alone that reduces them to this incapacity. Only enumerate the benefits and ſatisfactions, which Nature and Religion, which domeſtic and civil ſociety afford us as rational and moral creatures, and obſerve what it is that hinders you in the enjoyment of them; and you will no longer doubt of the truth I am now evincing. Generally ſpeaking, you daily enjoy many benefits from God; you daily receive many goods from his liberal hand. Theſe benefits, theſe goods, are certainly greater, both in number and magnitude, than the unavoidable and unmerited evils of life; and the devout and virtuous man who acknowledges them, who reflects upon them, who feels their worth, thereby prevents a thouſand murmurs. On putting theſe goods in one ſcale, and the evils in

the other, the latter muſt naturally ſtrike the beam, and the total amount of his happineſs muſt far exceed the ſum of his miſery. Whence comes it then that you frequently ſee the matter not thus, but otherwiſe? You do not conſider, you do not enjoy theſe goods as the benefactions of God. You enjoy them without conſideration, without ſentiment, without gratitude. Levity, pride, unbelief; in ſhort, ſin prevents you from taking them for what they are, and from feeling on their account what grateful creatures ought to feel. If Piety and Virtue inſpire your hearts, the ſlighteſt good you receive from God would therefore acquire a great worth in your eyes. The enjoyment of it would thence be far more taſteful and pleaſant. This too, you would ſay in thought, is a preſent from my bountiful Father in heaven; this too is a token of his beneficent providence, and his affection for me, his inconſiderable, his unworthy creature: "Lord!

"Lord! what is man that thou art mindful of him? What the ſon of man, that thou ſo regardeſt him?"

If we particularly contemplate the chief ſources of pleaſure we may here on earth enjoy, we are compelled to ſpeak of them in the ſame expreſſions. What a pleaſure the wiſe man and the Chriſtian finds in deſcanting on the manifold works of Creation, and the wiſe order of Providence; in reflecting on the nature of man, and the diſpenſations of God; in ideas of the perfection and happineſs for which he is deſigned, and the means by which God will gradually conduct him to it! What a pleaſure in the adoration and praiſe of the Sovereign Being, and in all the exerciſes of rational piety and devotion! Are you averſe to theſe pleaſures; do you hold them for fanaticiſm and fancy: then is it ſin that deprives you of them; ſin which debaſes your nature, enervates your ſpirit, corrupts your taſte,

gives you an earthly and carnal mind, and diveſts you of all capacity and inclination to raiſe yourſelf above the preſent and the viſible, and to maintain your pre-eminence above the irrational creatures.

What a fertile ſource of variegated pleaſure may we find in ſocial life, in the converſe with intelligent, mannerly, and virtuous men! But, would we enjoy this pleaſure; would we enjoy it in a certain degree of perfection; then we muſt be friendly; we muſt be humble, gentle, kind, and indulgent. If you be not ſo; if you have the oppoſite defects and failings; if you behold the advantages and merits of your brother with invidious eyes; if pride ſets you above them; if you allow yourſelf to be governed by the ſpirit of contradiction; if you are irritated at every real or imaginary failure in the reſpect you demand from others; if you accuſtom yourſelf always to look at men on their worſt ſide, and to impute

impute their beſt actions to unworthy deſigns and motives: then indeed you will not find in ſocial life the pleaſure and ſatisfaction it is able to procure you. It will rather be burdenſome to you, and give you new cauſes for complaint of human miſery. But, is it not ſin, is it not your untamed luſts and paſſions, that occaſion you this loſs, that deprive you of this felicity?

What a ſource of pleaſure is beneficence, to which ſo many opportunities daily invite both the poor and the rich, the ſmall and the great! How agreeably recompenſed is the wiſe man, the Chriſtian, for the moſt painful labours, for the moſt arduous affairs; how amply is he repaid the derelictions it may ſometimes coſt him, on ſeeing that this labour, theſe affairs, this abnegation, ſerves to promote the temporal or ſpiritual ſucceſs of his brother, or that at length, after various unſucceſsful and fruitleſs attempts, he finds he has been able

to

to effect ſome good! But this ſource of pleaſure likewiſe is ſhut againſt you who are in bondage to ſin and vice. If you allow yourſelf to be ſwayed by ſelf-intereſt; if you think you exiſt only for yourſelf, to regard yourſelf, and to provide for yourſelf alone; if you conſider other men, not as friends, not as brethren, but as ſtrangers, of little account with you, or even as enemies and traitors, againſt whom you are ever to keep on your guard, to whom you are never to truſt any concern; if you reckon every care and endeavour as loſt, which does not mediately or immediately tend to your own glory, to your own emolument: you deprive yourſelf indeed of a thouſand agreeable and charming ſenſations, which counterbalance a hoſt of the unavoidable hardſhips of life, and the recollection of which will enliven us even in its gloomieſt hours; but you deprive yourſelf of them by your own fault, and it is Sin you are to thank for this loſs.

What

What a ſource of pleaſure is friendſhip! How very much is the value of the goods we enjoy enhanced, when we can participate our ſatisfaction in them with a ſincere and hearty friend! How very much is the acuteſt diſtreſs diminiſhed, when we can pour our ſorrows into the boſom of a friend! What bitterneſs is there in life which honeſt friendſhip cannot ſweeten? How ſatisfying is the approbation of it, even under the reproaches of the world! how ſoothing its comforts in ſecret anguiſh! But whence comes it, that ſo few have the happineſs to underſtand and enjoy true friendſhip? It is ſin that deprives them of it; the vices to which they are addicted diſqualify them for it. There, where ſelfiſhneſs, pride, and falſhood dwell; where inordinate violent paſſions command: there can none of the gentle ſenſations, the quiet joys of friendſhip; there can none of her truſty companions, ſincerity, openheartedneſs, integrity, generoſity, find any room; there what bears

the

the name of friendſhip, becomes a low traffic of artifice and flattery, a ſelfiſh interchange of deceitful benefits, which none any longer ſeek than they find their advantage in it.

How great, in fine, is the domeſtic happineſs of the wiſe man, the Chriſtian! Let him paſs the greateſt part of the day in diſagreeable, irkſome labours; let the world requite his beſt ſervices with ingratitude and malignant ſcorn: what a refreſhment, what a reward is it to him, when he returns to his faithful ſpouſe, to his dear, his affectionate children, and, in company with them, forgets an ungrateful world; when he regains the familiar hearth, and enters into pleaſant, wiſe, and uſeful diſcourſe with the friends of his ſoul; when he can form the minds and the hearts of his children, delight himſelf in their amiable innocence and ſimplicity, accuſtom them to reflection, lead their judgement, confirm their

their taſte to what is right and real, make their duty their pleaſure, and obſerve the ſucceſs of his noble efforts! But you know not theſe recreations, theſe pleaſures, theſe rewards, you that are the ſervants of ſin and vice. Your own deficiency in wiſdom and virtue diſables you from imparting them to others, and from taſting the ſweets of theſe worthieſt of all employments. Your heart is become ſo hard and inſenſible, that none but wild and riotous joys can make any impreſſion upon it. Pride prevents you from condeſcending to the weakneſs and ſimplicity of children, and you do not perceive the importance of their firſt education; or your moroſe, uncomplying, imperious temper, renders you incapable of this employment, and of the pleaſures that are connected with it. In ſhort, it is ſin that renders this pure and fertile ſource of joy, foreclоſed and fruitleſs to you. Sin is therefore in this, as in all other reſpects, deſtruction to them that purſue

purſue it. An important truth! May it ever be preſent to us! May it in particular open the eyes of ſuch as have hitherto been blinded by ſin, and make them attentive to their true felicity!

O thou who ſigheſt under various evils which do not neceſſarily ariſe from the conſtitution of Nature, or from connexion with the creatures around thee, but proceed from thy temper and thy conduct, ceaſe to repine at the ſeverity of thy lot, at a cruel and inexorable fate. Dare not to charge the gracious and merciful Father of men with injuſtice towards thee. Complain not of him, "who is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works;" but blame thyſelf and thy folly. Lament not that thou art a man, for as ſuch thou art ordained to happineſs, and it depended on thee to be partaker of it: but lament that thou haſt miſtaken the deſign of thy being, that thou haſt ſtopped thy ears to the calls

of

of wiſdom and virtue, which alone can lead to happineſs; that thou haſt ſuffered thyſelf to be befooled by ſin; that thou haſt given credit to its deceitful promiſes; that thou haſt ſacrificed to it thy reaſon, thy freedom, thy honour, thy repoſe, and thy hopes. And, if thou art ſtill ſo fortunate as to find out this, if thou knoweſt the true ſource of thy miſery; oh! then forthwith forſake it. Flee, in holy terror, from the way that has brought thee ſo near upon perdition, and in which thou canſt not walk one moment longer without the extremeſt danger! Renounce, abjure iniquity, which has degraded and debaſed thee; which has enervated thy mind and thy body; which has rewarded thy ſlaviſh obedience with wretchedneſs and anguiſh. Shut thy ears for the future to the voice of this charmer. Let theſe words of Truth: "Deſtruction ſhall be to the workers of iniquity," never be out of thy mind and thy heart. Imbibe the inſtructions of wiſdom,

of virtue, and the fear of God, which ſtill, in all kindneſs, offer thee help, which ſtill will make thee happy. Follow their counſel; employ all the time, all the abilities, all the talents thou ſtill poſſeſſeſt, according to their ſuggeſtions; labour henceforth with unabating ardour to enlighten thy mind, to improve thy heart, to conquer thy luſts, to alter thy conduct; and implore, without ceaſing, of God, the Father of lights and grace, the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift, the aſſiſtance and ſupport he never withholds from them that devoutly and ſincerely aſk it. Then will thy wounded conſcience be relieved, thy reſtleſs heart compoſed, thy corrupted taſte refined, thy freedom again reſtored, thy hopes in God confirmed; then will the ſources of pleaſure and joy be opened to thee which thou haſt hitherto not known or not regarded, and yet which can alone procure us real joy, and real pleaſure. Then will the very evil, under which

which, on account of thy former ſins, thou ſtill muſt ſigh, ſerve thee for warning, for amendment, for exerciſe in virtue, and hereafter, with this body of death, they will quit thee for ever, and thy end will be complete and unterminating bliſs.

SIN

CONSIDERED AS

THE PRINCIPAL SOURCE

OF

HUMAN MISERY,

IN REGARD TO

THE FUTURE STATE.

O Iſrael, thou haſt deſtroyed thyſelf, but in me is thine help. Hoſea xiii. 9.

SIN

CONSIDERED AS

THE PRINCIPAL SOURCE

OF

HUMAN MISERY,

IN REGARD TO

THE FUTURE STATE.

VERY few Chriſtians are indeed abſolutely indifferent in regard to the bliſs that is promiſed to the confeſſors of Jeſus in the world to come, or there are few who do not flatter themſelves with the hope of obtaining it. There are, however, but too many who do ſo on inſufficient grounds, and will find themſelves hereafter deplorably deceived in their expectations. And what is now the cauſe of this? The

bliſs of heaven is conſidered as a free gift of divine mercy and grace, as a fruit and effect of what Chriſt has done and ſuffered for mankind: and ſo in fact it is. But it is not conſidered, that this felicity ſtands in a very cloſe connexion with our preſent ſtate; that it preſuppoſes in man certain qualities and capacities, a certain way of thinking and acting, certain inclinations and diſpoſitions, without which he cannot enjoy it, or, if he might, could not be happy in that enjoyment. If a man make only the former ſtatement of this happineſs, namely, in ſo far as it depends on the grace of God and the merits of our Redeemer, he may eaſily be deluded by fallacious hopes. For, what has he not to expect from a God, who has already accorded him ſo many tokens of his kindneſs and protection, of his patience and long-ſuffering, whom every thing proclaims to be the moſt affectionate and merciful Father of men; what may he not, amidſt all his

un-

unworthineſs and frailty, venture to hope for from ſuch a God? And what has he not to promiſe himſelf from the Saviour of the world, from the tender and affectionate friend of man, whom it coſt ſo much to redeem mankind, and who performed ſuch extraordinary things that they might not periſh, but have everlaſting life? Yet, how juſt ſoever theſe concluſions, in certain reſpects, may be, that moſt important queſtion ſtill remains concerning our hopes of happineſs. The matter is, not only how large the kindneſs, how great the compaſſion and grace of God and Chriſt may be, but likewiſe whether we have the capacity for enjoying the effects of it in the future world? Let a man have never ſo powerful a patron, ſo liberal a friend; let his friend be never ſo much inclined to impart to him of his riches, his power, his pleaſures, his prerogatives: what will it all help, if he find no reliſh in theſe communications; if diſeaſes, pains, and in-

firmities prevent his enjoying them; or if any thing elſe in his circumſtances render him incapable of it? Juſt ſo is the caſe with the happineſs of heaven. God has promiſed it to us on certain conditions; Chriſt has prepared the way to it for us; we are invited to it; and we cannot doubt of the readineſs of God and Chriſt to make us partakers of it. But are we capable of this happineſs? Can God grant it us, can we enjoy it, if we remain as we are, if we die in this frame? Can God exalt us to the poſſeſſion of ſuch goods, and render us happy by ſuch goods, as we do not underſtand, as we do not prize, do not love, and know not how to employ? This is the grand queſtion, and yet is perhaps the leaſt thought of. Did a man but duly reflect upon it, he would ſoon find, that a want of virtue and piety, that a love of iniquity, an earthly mind and a vicious heart, muſt render us totally unfit for the bliſs of hea-

ven,

ven, and that therefore, in this reſpect, likewiſe, ſin is our deſtruction.

A ſhort time ago we took occaſion to treat of this matter in ſeveral important conſiderations, which we reduced to four propoſitions. The firſt was: Sin brings very many evils on man, from which, were he virtuous, he would be totally free. The ſecond was: Sin indiſpoſes a man for rendering light and tolerable thoſe evils which he cannot wholly avoid. The third was: Sin prevents him from the true enjoyment of that good which not only counterbalances the evil in the world, but far outweighs it; or, from finding that happineſs in the enjoyment of it, which, were he virtuous, he might find therein, and which would, in that caſe, ſupply the want of ſo many other things, and indemnify him for ſo many hardſhips and evils. Theſe three propoſitions we have already diſcuſſed and proved. We have ſtill however the fourth

propoſition, which we could not then examine, to bring forward to a ſomewhat nicer ſcrutiny. It runs thus: Sin incapacitates a man for the ſtate of pure and perfect bliſs, which awaits the righteous in the world to come. The elucidation and demonſtration of this propoſition, will now demand, as it ſurely deſerves, our whole attention; for it relates to a matter that nearly concerns us all, and has the ſtrongeſt influence on our whole well-being.

We muſt firſt of all define a little more preciſely the words and expreſſions we have here made uſe of, and ſhew what is taken already for granted in the propoſition we have now to evince.

When we aſſert, that ſin incapacitates man for ſharing in the bliſs of heaven, we underſtand by ſin, not ſuch inadvertent failings as a man commits out of haſte and infirmity, which he acknowledges, bewails, and

and is ever labouring ſincerely to correct; but we mean purpoſed, wilful ſins, a preponderant inclination and love to this or the other kind of ſins, a diſpoſition, vicious, earthly, carnal, and at variance with the will of God. When we ſpeak of the bliſs of heaven, we would imply, not ſo much the voluntary rewards which God, in his prudent bounty, will impart to the juſt; and of which, in our preſent ſtate, we can form no conception, as rather the natural good and agreeable conſequences which the pious and virtuous temper, and the pious and virtuous conduct here on earth of men, will draw after them in the future world; conſequences, which muſt of neceſſity ſtand in the cloſeſt relation to the degrees of perfection we here attain. And this relation likewiſe ſhews us in what ſenſe we ſay of vicious men, that they are incapable of the bliſs of heaven. We do not therein imply, that their ſouls are ſo conſtituted, that they cannot abſolutely find any

any reliſh for this happineſs, if God ſhould place them anew in a ſtate of preparation, and if, in that ſtate, by inſtruction, by reflection, by practice, and actual enjoyment, they ſhould come by degrees to underſtand the value of heavenly goods, to compare them with their former idle pleaſures, and learn to prize them duly: but we would only be underſtood to mean thus much that in the temper and frame which the vicious man takes with him out of this world, no reaſon is diſcoverable for making us comprehend how he, at once, and without a peculiar divine illumination and inſpiration, which he certainly of all men has no right to look for, can ſeek and find his happineſs in quite different employments and pleaſures, from thoſe in which alone he has hitherto ſought it.

We take for granted likewiſe, that the future life relates to the preſent, and ſtands in the ſtricteſt connexion with it. If this were

were not the caſe; if in death we loſt the conſciouſneſs of ourſelf, and the remembrance of the paſt; if the union between our preſent and former ſtate were broken and diſſolved: then muſt we be, as it were, new moulded; it would not be us, but other creatures that live in our ſtead; then would the arrangements which God has made on earth for our improvement, our diſcipline, and trial, be all in vain; then would our preſent ſtate not be, as Reaſon and Scripture inform us that it is, a ſtate of diſcipline and preparation, and the future ſtate not a ſtate of retribution. If therefore we would not fly in the face of all that our own reflections, as well as the Sacred writings, tell us of our deſtination and the deſigns of God; we muſt neceſſarily conſider our future ſtate as a continuation of the preſent, and allow them a cloſe connexion together.

We

We farther preſuppoſe, and this preſuppoſition is a natural conſequence of what I before advanced, we preſuppoſe that a man retains after death the mind, the temper, the inclinations, he had here on earth, and which here have ſwayed him; and that he carries them with him into the world of ſpirits. If this be not the caſe, then muſt God, as I have already intimated, diveſt us at the moment of death of our temper and frame of mind, which compoſe our moral character, and direct our inclinations, by a miracle of his power, to quite other objects. But we have not only no reaſon to expect this, but have the ſtrongeſt reaſons to believe the contrary. For, if ſuch a great and wonderful change ſhould take place in us by death; if we were to receive at once a quite different mind and quite different inclinations: could we truly be ſaid to be the ſame moral perſons? Could we be rewarded or puniſhed as ſuch? And is ſuch a ſudden metamorphoſis conformable

formable to our nature? Are not time and practice indiſpenſable, are not repeated, continued endeavours indiſpenſable to the acquiſitions of other diſpoſitions, for acting contrarily to propenſities that have been long indulged? Does not every thing tell us, in all that we ſee in Creation and Providence, that God proceeds with his creatures conformably to their natures, and that their improvement, as well as their deterioration goes gradually on; and that it is effected, not without their concurrence, but principally by their own agency and conſent? And does not Holy Scripture ſay the ſame: "Whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap; for he that ſoweth to his fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption: but he that ſoweth to the ſpirit, ſhall of the ſpirit reap life everlaſting?

This being premiſed, it will not be difficult for us to ſhew, that a wicked, vicious, groveling diſpoſition, renders men incapable

ble of enjoying the bliſs of heaven. Two conſiderations will, I hope, ſet this matter beyond all doubt.

Experience teaches us, firſt, that it is impoſſible for us to be happy if we are forcibly deprived of the things on which our principal inclinations and appetites are ſet, and wherein alone we ſeek our happineſs; if we violently hanker after theſe things, and yet ſee them only at a great diſtance from us, or are abſolutely without hope of ever obtaining them. Give a man as many goods as you can ſuppoſe, which he does not covet, or which he widely poſtpones to others, he will ever remain unhappy and wretched ſo long as you deny him thoſe which he accounts his higheſt good, and to which his prime longings and ſtrivings are directed. Let the ambitious man, for example, be ſupplied with all kinds of ſenſual gratifications and pleaſures; let him poſſeſs health, and ſtrength, and opulence; but

but debar him the way to power and fame; prevent him from elevating himſelf to the point of reſpect he holds conſtantly before him as the ſcope of his deſires; he will be unhappy in the poſſeſſion of the greateſt diſtinctions, ſo long as he feels the boundaries that are ſet to his predominant paſſion, ſo long as he ſees no outlet for giving to that its full career. What is true in this life, will alſo be true in the life to come. What is now conformable to our nature, will likewiſe be conformable to our nature then. Tranſport the wilful ſinner, the vicious, the groveling-minded man, into heaven, where the juſt are aſſembled. Shall you therefore have rendered him happy? or will he there be more capable of happineſs than here? there, where every thing that promiſed him happineſs here, or even in part procured it him, no longer exiſts? He brings his deſires and propenſities with him into the future world, for he held them faſt to his end. He thinks,

judges, longs, and wiſhes there, juſt as he thought, judged, longed, and wiſhed here. His endeavours here after what might flatter his luſts and ſooth his paſſions, have often been fruitleſs; but oft has he been beguiled by a curſory enjoyment of the things after which he ſtrove, conſtantly has he been deluded by the hope of a more perfect and laſting enjoyment of them. But there will the whole of that wherein here he ſought, and at times even found, or at leaſt imagined he found, his pleaſure, his glory, his benefit, will no longer have exiſtence. How can he be happy there? Or, can the avaricious man, who was then only alive and delighted when he could heap treaſure on treaſure, when he could barter or ſell his goods to great advantage, when he was counting his riches, when he was contemplating his extenſive claims on the neceſſaries and conveniencies of this life, or could realize theſe claims by his great revenues; can he be happy there, where

where theſe neceſſaries and conveniences no longer are known, where thoſe treaſures are no longer of any value, where they will not procure him the ſmalleſt reſpect, not gain him the ſlighteſt advantage, where they are no more, where he is deſpoiled of them for ever, and yet knows and loves no better treaſures that may indemnify him for their loſs? And is not the caſe the ſame with the ambitious, with the ſlave of vanity, with the voluptuary, with the envious and malicious, with the earthly-minded? They all carry with them their perverſe way of thinking and judging, their corrupted taſte, their inordinate luſts, their violent paſſions, their earthly mind, into the future world. Their appetites and propenſities will be turned towards the very ſame, or ſimilar objects, with thoſe towards which they were directed here. They will ſeek their happineſs in the very ſame things, wherein they ſought it here. But they muſt neceſſarily fail in their aims. Their en-

deavours to get nearer to them cannot but be in vain. And can a man in ſuch a ſituation be happy? Muſt not the deſires which are become ſo natural to him, and which he cannot ſatisfy, be a perpetual torment to him? Muſt they not, ſo long as they have any authority over him, make him utterly incapable of aſpiring after goods of another kind, of ſeeking them, of enjoying them, and of being happy in their enjoyment?

I am not to be informed, that the body and externals contribute moſt to the raiſing and nouriſhing of evil deſires in the vicious man, and that therefore in altered outward circumſtances theſe deſires may be enfeebled, and receive another direction. But does this invariably happen? and is it probable that it ſhould happen by means of death? May not theſe inclinations of the ſoul become at length ſo natural, and as it were eſſential, may they not ſo cloſely incorporate

corporate themſelves into the whole ſeries of its cuſtomary ideas, that they may even ſubſiſt without the ſmalleſt incitement from externals, and under the conſciouſneſs of a total deficiency of the objects towards which they are directed, and occaſion the moſt extreme perturbation and ruin? Will not this be the caſe ſo long, at leaſt, as the ſoul remains without connexion with any new body in the inviſible world, and is left entirely to itſelf and its own reflections? And can we, completely ignorant as we are in regard of its future relation towards outward things, conclude with any probability on the influence of theſe things upon its temper and diſpoſitions? May not even theſe things furniſh freſh nutriment to its corrupt and ſinful propenſities with ſuch as have been habituated to judge falſely of all things, and to uſe them amiſs? Does not the nature and effect of the impreſſions which men receive from without, depend greatly on the degree of knowledge, on the

character and moral condition of their ſpirit? And muſt not this likewiſe obtain in the future world? Can we eaſily be miſtaken if we conclude, from what now is, or what will be hereafter, and figure to ourſelves the tranſit of rational creatures from one ſtate of being to another, not as a leap, but as a change which takes its riſe from the preceding, and is moſt intimately connected with it?—However, we will dwell no longer on this. The ſecond proof will ſet the whole affair in a ſtill clearer light; and it is of ſuch a nature as to be ſufficient, without any aſſiſtance from the firſt, to demonſtrate what it ought to demonſtrate.

Experience then teaches us, ſecondly, that it is impoſſible for us to be happy there, where no other pleaſures and occupations are to be found, than ſuch as are in oppoſition to our taſte and propenſities, which are entirely foreign to us, which we have

have never concerned ourſelves about, which we have beheld with indifference, or treated with ſcorn, which we have poſtponed to all other employments and pleaſures; how noble ſoever theſe foreign occupations, and how pure and how lofty ſoever theſe indifferent pleaſures, in and of themſelves, and in reference to others, may be. Thus, however, it is with the occupations and pleaſures of the bleſſed in heaven. They are contrary to the taſte and propenſities of the vicious man. They are foreign and irkſome to him. He is therefore abſolutely unqualified for enjoying the felicity that is concomitant with them. In what we here on earth take no delight, in that ſhall we likewiſe find none in heaven. What here ſeems irkſome and diſguſtful to us, will there be irkſome and diſguſtful to us alſo. For we ſhall there not directly learn to think and act quite otherwiſe than here; but we ſhall there reap the fruit of the good or bad manner in which we have

thought and acted here. The future life is not to be a totally different and quite contrary life to this; but it muſt be, eſpecially in regard to the exertion of our intellect and the practice of virtue, a continuation and retribution of the preſent. Therefore, the ſame difference that ſubſiſts between the taſte, the propenſities, and aptitudes of the pious and the wicked in the preſent world, will ſubſiſt in the future likewiſe. As little ſuſceptible as they are now of any particular kind of pleaſure, ſo little will they be ſo then. Place here a pious and a vicious man together, who both frequent a reaſonable worſhip. The former finds a generous pleaſure in it. Wherefore? His ſpirit is then employed in matters which he conſtantly holds to be the moſt important and exalted, and which even confer a certain dignity and grandeur upon him, which any where elſe he does not ſo ſenſibly feel. He ſtrengthens himſelf in his belief of the truth; and truth is

ineſtimable

ineſtimable to him. He opens his heart to the ſentiments of reverence towards God, to love for the Redeemer of the world, to benevolence and brotherly kindneſs towards all mankind; and theſe ſentiments enlarge and chear his heart in the moſt agreeable manner. He prays; he praiſes God; he imbibes his will; and all this procures him light and reſt, conſolation and joy. The other, on the contrary, the vicious and earthly-minded man, laments, as it were, the time he is obliged to devote to theſe objects. They are tireſome to him. Wherefore? He does not account theſe things to be of ſo great importance as they are. He does not know the beauty and advantage of them. He finds no taſte in them. He has no pleaſant ſenſations from them, or they excite quite diſagreeable ſenſations in him, which he would willingly baniſh or ſuppreſs. Do you think now, that the vicious, the earthly-minded man can and will find more taſte in theſe kinds

of

of pleaſures and employments, in the world of the juſt, than he does at preſent? Nay, as I ſhewed at the beginning, he will preſerve his propenſities, his frame and temper of mind, in the future ſtate, and judge and act according to it. But how indiſpoſed muſt this render him to all wherein the bleſſed find the whole of their happineſs and their glory! Only call to mind what Holy Scripture, and the very nature of things, conſpire to teach us of this glorious ſtate; and you will ſoon apprehend how little it is adapted to the man that is addicted to ſin, and devoid of all true piety and virtue.

The bleſſed, in that life, to uſe the terms of Scripture, will ſee God; that is, they will learn to know him better and more juſtly. God will more intimately reveal himſelf to them. They will receive new means and opportunities for forming worthy conceptions of his attributes, of his ways

ways and works, of his counſels and his decrees. They will diſcover new diſplays of his omnipotence, of his wiſdom, and his goodneſs. They ſee the Son of the Higheſt, their great Deliverer, in his glorified humanity. They will ſee the tranſcendent glory with which the Father has inveſted him, and be led into all truth by him himſelf. This will doubtleſs be at once their moſt delightful occupation, and the richeſt ſource of their pleaſure. Thence will the fervent deſire, which now actuates all the powers of their ſoul, their ardent aſpirations to know ſomewhat more of the Firſt, the Greateſt, the Beſt of all Beings, and more cloſely to be acquainted with the ſublime Philanthropiſt, who has purchaſed them with his blood, be fully ſatisfied; and yet will it remain active enough for never allowing them to be weary in their noble endeavours after a ſtill higher degree of light and knowledge. But now are theſe endeavours, are theſe delights, adapted to

ſuch of you as are wholly earthly and fleſhly-minded, to you who have not learnt to riſe above things viſible, and to buſy yourſelves about things that are not ſeen? How? Religion is indifferent to you; her exalted doctrines move you not; you content yourſelves with the ſlighteſt knowledge of them; you reckon the time you are forced to apply to it, as loſt; you prefer all other kinds of ſcience and knowledge, to the knowledge of God, of Chriſt, of his revealed will; you are ſurrounded with innumerable prodigies of divine omnipotence, wiſdom, and goodneſs, and you heed them not; you even diſmiſs from you all reflection on God and divine concerns, as far as you can; you are afraid of being diſquieted by ſuch reflections, and diſturbed in your joys and your levity: and you ſhall be capable of employing yourſelves in theſe reflections a whole eternity long, and find your felicity in them! You ſhall be capable of applying your powers and your time,

time, with heartfelt pleaſure, and with a conſtantly renewed zeal in conſiderations and inquiries, which are now ſo foreign, ſo irkſome, ſo unpleaſant to you!

The life of the bleſſed in heaven will, farther, be a life of the pureſt, the moſt exalted piety and devotion. The God whom they have feared and loved above all things here, in whoſe ſervice and worſhip they have already paſſed ſo many bleſſed hours, will certainly be there much more the object of their ſincereſt love, their profoundeſt adoration, and their heartieſt praiſe. To admire his infinite greatneſs, to extol the methods of his providence, to magnify the wonders of his grace, to declare his inexpreſſible love and the love of his ſon Jeſus, and to glorify him in all their thoughts, and words, and works; this will inconteſtably be their worthieſt employment, their greateſt joy. But is it an employment, is it a joy, that you are ſuſceptible

ceptible of, you in whoſe heart the fear and love of God has never maintained the ſuperiority over your other appetites and inſtincts, and to whom the worſhip of the Sovereign Being was grievous? How? You neglect under every nugatory pretence the frequentation of the houſe of God, where your fellow-creatures are employed in his ſervice: you even neglect prayer, the praiſe of God, and private devotion at home, and ſpend the little time that remains to you from your affairs, in merely idle diſſipation and childiſh amuſements: or you perform theſe ſacred obſervances with diſlike, with diſguſt, in an extremely cold and drowzy manner; you ſeldom think on your dependence upon God; you enjoy the manifold benefits he allows you to enjoy, as men and as Chriſtians, with an inſenſible and ungrateful heart; you loſe the Divine Providence out of ſight, or murmur againſt it when it does not comply with your extravagant deſires: and you

ſhall

ſhall be capable of bringing to God, in that other world, the pure ſacrifice of adoration, of praiſe, of gratitude, of love, of ſubmiſſion, of reſignation, which are brought to him by all the inhabitants of heaven! And you ſhall be capable of ſeeking your higheſt honour and ſovereign happineſs in thus drawing nigh unto God, and in having communion with him!

The life of the juſt in heaven is a life of perfect holineſs. It is the completeſt practice of virtue; virtue, which they here eſteemed and loved above riches, and honours, and life, in which they conſtantly exerciſed themſelves, the defects and interruptions of which they ſo often bewailed with ſcalding tears, and which, notwithſtanding all their infirmities and failings, maintained its ſupremacy always in their hearts, and was the rule of their conduct. No more to ſin; never to deviate from the precepts of Wiſdom and moral order; to

apply

apply duly all their capacities and powers to the will of God, and to proceed from one degree of moral perfection to another: what a raviſhing joy, what a ſource of ſatisfaction, muſt this be to the man who has a ruling propenſity to whatever is decent, whatever is true, whatever is right, whatever is generous and laudable! But, are you capable of drawing from theſe wells of ſatisfaction and joy, you, who hold Virtue for an empty name; or, if you do not deny her exiſtence, yet do not underſtand her worth, nor feel her charms; or, even if you be not entirely ignorant of her value, yet have not ſo much eſteem and love for her, as to make you ſacrifice for her ſake the low cupidites of the body, and ſome of the advantages of the world? Are you capable of ſeeking your glory and happineſs in Virtue, you, who deride her ſincereſt votaries, ſport with their conſcientiouſneſs, pronounce them moroſe and gloomy perſons, and trumpet approbation and ap-

plauſe

plauſe to crafty and ſucceſsful vice? Are you capable of properly feeling the happineſs of ſinning and failing no more, you, who are ſo eaſily and ſo readily tempted to evil, and ſubmit to the temptation; who lament and bewail every other loſs more than the loſs of innocence and peace of mind? Are you capable of practiſing virtue in its higheſt perfection, you, who have never once begun to practiſe it in ſincerity though in weakneſs; from whom every good deed muſt be in a manner extorted; who have acquired an aptitude, not in goodneſs, but in iniquity; to whom lying, or intemperance, or injuſtice, or rancour, or ſome other vice, is become a ſecond nature; or who only take pains ſo to be juſt and virtuous, as you hold it indiſpenſably neceſſary for eſcaping ſhame in this world and puniſhment in the next? May it not likewiſe here be ſaid; "How can you do good, how can you be happy in goodneſs, who are accuſtomed to do evil?"

The life of the bleſſed in heaven will be an amicable life, where all the ſocial virtues will be practiſed in perfection; where ſincerity, and openheartedneſs, and modeſty, and peace, and concord, and love, prevail; where a mutual, diſintereſted, and beneficent endeavour to impart perfection and happineſs to others, to connect all hearts together in the cloſeſt ties, and where all the ſources of pleaſure, as various as abundant, will ſtand open. Neither pride, nor vanity, nor envy, nor falſhoood, neither tyranny nor ſtrife, will exiſt in that bleſſed abode. With one accord to join in ſerving God; with one accord to conſider the wonders of his creation and providence; together to proclaim the greatneſs of his bounty and grace; to diſſeminate truth and virtue according to the extent of means; to rejoice in the bliſs of a brother as well as in one's own; to make more extenſive diſcernment and power conduce to the nobleſt works of benefi-

cence: this will certainly be the diſpoſition, the employment, and the happineſs, of the righteous in that life to come. Now, I beſeech you, are men, who ſerve ſin and vice, ſuited to ſuch a ſociety? Are they capable of taking part in their happineſs, or of promoting it? How? Men who love diſſimulation and deceit; who allow themſelves to be governed by pride, by envy, by vanity; who are fooliſh enough to make important matters of contentions about precedency, and outward diſtinctions; men who can never live peaceably and friendly in the domeſtic and civil ſociety to which they belong, who find pleaſure in contradiction and ſtrife; men who are ſo ſelfiſh as to think and to care for themſelves alone, who only prize that which they poſſeſs alone, or have in common with but few, whom other men's happineſs and miſery affect but little, or who even dare to build their welfare on the ruin of others; men who miſapply their power, their credit,

their opulence, not in doing good, but in oppreſſing the poor and the innocent, or ſolely to their own advantage and to the enriching of their family; men who are aſhamed in company to ſpeak of God and ſacred things, who deſpiſe ſuch diſcourſe, however naturally it may ariſe, as the effects of an extravagancy of piety and pretended devotion, and had rather converſe on the moſt inſignificant trifles, than on ſubjects that in all reſpects are the moſt important; are ſuch men ſuited to conſort with the juſt, who think directly otherwiſe, judge directly otherwiſe, are directly otherways diſpoſed, and are employed in quite other affairs, than they? Shall they be capable of a felicity, of which they have no notion, after which they have never ſtriven, and which is ſo manifeſtly in direct oppoſition to the whole of their character? No; no more than light and darkneſs can conſiſt together, no more can Virtue and Vice have fellowſhip together in that ſtate of perfection.

Laſtly,

Laſtly, as the Scripture aſſures us, "God, in that better world, will be all in all." The bleſſed will have him perpetually before their eyes, and only live and be happy in him and in the ſentiment of his favour and affection. Whatever they do will be done with no other view than to pleaſe and to glorify Him. All the happineſs they ſhall enjoy will be enjoyed with regard to him; and this firſt renders their joys the joys of heaven. But how, think you, ſhall we be indeed capable of thinking, of feeling, and of acting thus, if here on earth we have had a quite earthly mind, and carry this earthly mind along with us into the future world? How? You, who ſo ſeldom at preſent think on God, ſo ſeldom ſeek him; who aſcribe every thing that befalls you, whether good or bad, to other cauſes; who advert more to fate, or chance, or fortune, and other ſimilar non-entities, than to God and his providence; who do all that you do, merely from ſelf-

intereſt, or vanity, or the fear of man, or for ſatisfying the demands of your ſenſual deſires; ſhall you hereafter be capable of taking up a quite contrary diſpoſition, and demean yourſelves by quite different principles? Shall you ſeek and be able to find in them your honour, your pleaſure, your bliſs? No; it is impoſſible in this, as in all other reſpects, for the vicious, the earthly-minded man to be happy there, where no other laws, pleaſures, and occupations have place, but ſuch as are directly oppoſite to his inclinations, his taſte, and his habits.

And what is the concluſion we are to make from all this? It is this: that ſin is the deſtruction of man; that it is the principal ſource of his miſery in this and in the future world; that no other means are to be had for becoming capable and for partaking of the bleſſedneſs of heaven, than the actual converſion, the actual alteration

and

and reformation of our temper and conduct, the ſteady direction of our inclinations and deſires to whatever is real, good, noble, well-pleaſing in the ſight of God, and will be ſo for ever. Let no man therefore flatter himſelf with the hope of a late repentance. Let no man ſtave it off to the laſt hours or days of his life. This hope is without foundation: this delay is irrational. In a few hours or days the mind and heart of a man is not to be altered without a miracle, and this miracle God has no where promiſed to perform. A man may then indeed bewail his ſins; but this contrition is generally wrung from him by the circumſtances in which he is. But ſeldom, ſeldom is it ſincere and efficacious. No ſooner are theſe circumſtances changed, but the ſinful propenſities of the human heart return to their former bent, and this bent renders him unqualified for the happineſs of heaven. Neither let any man appeal for a teſtimony to the contrary, to the

example of the thief on the croſs. How much may he call to mind againſt it! At preſent only attend to this: What has happened in extraordinary circumſtances, what has happened only in one inſtance, what is and ever will be ſingular in its kind, cannot be made to ſerve us for a rule, cannot give us the leaſt probable expectation, that it will happen ſo with us. No; it is to us of no avail at all. Would you be bleſſed; then muſt you firſt be capable of bleſſedneſs. And this you cannot be ſo long as any evil diſpoſition rules within you, ſo long as you are addicted to any ſin, to any vice. Sin is the deſtruction of man both in this and in the other world. Virtue and piety are the only road to happineſs. It is even not enough, that we ceaſe to do evil, that we relinquiſh ſin, that we perform good actions. We muſt have a hatred to evil, we muſt have an abhorrence for ſin, we muſt learn to love goodneſs. Our heart, our mind, muſt be changed and reformed.

We

We muſt learn ſo to think, to judge, and to act, as they in heaven think, and judge, and act. We muſt direct our inclinations and deſires to ſuch things as have a value there, and will preſerve it for ever. We muſt now render eaſy and agreeable to us the occupations which await us there. Theſe are the only means for becoming capable of the bliſs of heaven: and if we be capable of it, then ſhall we as ſurely be partakers in it, as God is God; for he conducts every creature, as its nature and capacities allow, from one degree of perfection to another; nay, he has promiſed us this happineſs expreſſly by his Son, and this Son of the God of Truth has confirmed the certainty of this promiſe by his death and by his reſurrection. Let us then, ſince we have ſuch glorious promiſes, let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs in the fear of God. Let us continually watch, continually pray, keep continually firm to

our

our duty, and ſo behave as ſervants that expect their Lord; that the Lord, when he comes, may find us faithful and ready, and receive us into his glory.

HOW

HOW

A MAN

MAKES HIMSELF

PARTAKER

OF

OTHER MEN'S SINS.

Neither be partaker of other men's sins.

1 Tim. v. 22.

HOW A MAN MAKES HIMSELF PARTAKER OF OTHER MEN'S SINS.

THE true Chriſtian, if he would deſervedly bear that name, can never be too circumſpect in his words and actions, and in the whole of his conduct. The various connections in which he ſtands with other men; the influence his conduct may have, and actually has, on theirs; the innumerable good or bad conſequences with which it is attended, in reference to the whole ſociety wherein he lives, nay, frequently

quently in regard to remoteſt poſterity, obliges him to pay all poſſible attention, to become offenſive or injurious to none, but to be as uſeful to all as he finds it poſſible. It is not enough that he fear the Lord his God for himſelf, and make it his delight to keep his law. He muſt let his light alſo ſhine before men. He muſt apply all his powers to the promoting of the knowledge and the rational worſhip of God, to the ſpreading of truth, of piety, and virtue. It is not enough that he hate and eſchew ſin for himſelf, and is ever labouring to cleanſe himſelf from all defilement of fleſh and ſpirit, and to live in the liberty of the children of God. He muſt ſtrive, as much as poſſible, to weaken and ſubvert the empire of ſin and vice, without him; he muſt carefully abſtain from every thing that may give others an occaſion or inducement to ſin, that may confirm and tranquillize them in their evil diſpoſition, or excuſe their faults and exceſſes; he muſt

ſo

ſo manage all his looks, his words, and his works, as neither directly nor indirectly to countenance impiety, but much rather, in all reſpects to diſgrace, to confound, and to puniſh it. He who deſignedly neglects theſe duties, takes upon him the guilt of other men's ſins, and deſerves the ſame puniſhment as if he himſelf had committed the ſin in his own perſon. Therefore it is that St. Paul cautions Timothy, and with him each real Chriſtian, againſt this inconſiſtent behaviour, when he ſays, "Be not partaker of other men's ſins." The eaſier it is for a man to fail in this behalf; ſo much the more neceſſary it is for us to form juſt conceptions of this extenſive and important obligation. How ſhall we avoid the failures in it, if we do not know them, or if we do not perceive their bad and pernicious effects? Let us therefore apply ſome moments to this conſideration:

How

How a man makes himſelf partaker of other men's ſins.

It happens, firſt, when a man ſo far abuſes the authority he has over others as to require of them what is bad and ſinful in itſelf; whether it be unrighteous rulers who iſſue ſuch orders to their ſubjects as are at ſtrife with the laws of Reaſon and true Religion; or inconſiderate parents, who enjoin their children ſuch actions as militate againſt the dictates of virtue, of integrity, of honour, and decorum; or, finally, ſelfiſh maſters, who require of their ſervants things incompatible with the duties of honeſty, equity, humanity, fidelity, and truth. In all theſe caſes, they who give ſuch unrighteous commands ſin as much as he that performs them. That king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, daringly commanded his ſubjects to fall down and worſhip the golden image which he had ſet up, and to worſhip it as the true God. They undoubtedly

doubtedly ſinned in the higheſt degree in obeying this ſenſeleſs and tyrannical command. No human authority is competent to enfeeble or deſtroy the immutable relation in which we ſtand to the great Creator of heaven and earth; and we render ourſelves guilty of high treaſon againſt the Divine Majeſty, if, from the fear of man and a ſlaviſh obedience, we comply with ſuch injunctions as are at variance with his ſacred and inviolable will. We ought to obey God (this is an eternal decree), we ought to obey God, rather than men. The friends of Daniel ſaw this truth with full conviction. Nothing could induce them to deny the only true God, or to do any thing that was contrary to his will. Their undaunted courage, their unſhaken confidence in the Almighty, ought reaſonably to have ſerved as an example to others, and have kept them from executing the impious commandment of their king. But did not the guilt of all their ſins rebound upon

the head of him who iſſued this command, and enforced obedience to it by the ſevereſt threats, who abuſed his power to inſult the honour of Omnipotence, and employed the blind ſubmiſſion of his people to induce them to revolt againſt the Creator and Sovereign of the world?

We, ſecondly, make ourſelves partakers of other men's ſins, when we employ others as the inſtruments of our ſins and iniquities. The wretch that is actuated by low ſelf-intereſt, has no deſire to hurt another; and the crimes he commits in the name of his ſuperiors on whom he depends proceed more from an undue compliance, from an inordinate thirſt after riches and honours, than from premeditated malice. He knows that this is the ſhorteſt way to conciliate the favour of him who incites him to ſuch undertakings; he ſees that by theſe means he may better his condition, advance his fortune, and

and procure reſpect; and thus raiſe himſelf from the duſt, into notice and importance. At firſt, indeed, he doubts whether even theſe advantages are of value enough to be purchaſed at the price of a manifeſt breach of integrity, and its ordinary concomitant the loſs of inward peace. But at length he ſtifles the remonſtrances of conſcience, and eludes the ſuggeſtions of reaſon. He flatters himſelf with the fallacious hopes, that his criminality cannot be great, as he is not the firſt mover and author of it, as his views are not to injure any, or to bring them into misfortune, but merely to execute the will of him whom he regards as the promoter of his earthly welfare. The vexations or oppreſſions he occaſions his brethren, as an inſtrument of the revenge or the animoſity of another, would ſtill, he thinks, enſue, though he ſhould refuſe to inflict them. But he does not reflect, that all theſe excuſes are not ſufficient to juſtify him before the ſupreme tribunal of Heaven;

that it is the baſeſt of all villainies to acquire the favour of men by evil deeds: and that all other conſiderations muſt give way to the obſervance of the divine commands, to the diſcharge of the duties we owe to our neighbour.

A man farther makes himſelf partaker of other men's ſins, when he abets another in his wicked undertakings, by council, or by actual aſſiſtance. Many a one is inſenſible or malicious enough to plunge his neighbour into ruin. He only contrives how he may promote his own temporal proſperity, or advance his vicious pleaſure; and he makes no conſcience of doing it even by ſpoiling the widow and the orphan, by the ruin of the innocent. But he is wanting in ſtratagem; he does not diſcover how he may compaſs the matter, how he may accompliſh his baſe deſigns in the ſpeedieſt and ſureſt way. He comes to another, who probably is leſs wicked, but more artful,

than

than himſelf. He, out of corrupt but ſpecious friendſhip, or from want of univerſal benevolence, gives him a ſketch of the manner in which he is to begin his attempts for gratifying his extravagant deſires, and ſatiating his furious luſts; and thus takes part in all the enormities the former is determined to commit. Another is deficient neither in craft nor malice. He rages with deſire to revenge himſelf on his adverſary, or to ſatisfy ſome other vile luſt, and is acquainted with all the ways and means that may ſerve him to his purpoſe. But he has not power and credit enough to avail himſelf of them with effect; he is unable to execute the unrighteous project he has formed to the hurt of his neighbour, unleſs he calls in the aid of a mightier than himſelf. He finds one ſuch, who mediately or immediately gives him his countenance; ſupports him by the protection he vouchſafes, by the reverence he ſhews, by the opportunities

he procures him. Is not this man as criminal as the other, ſince it was in his power to have defeated his iniquitous ſchemes, by a rational and prudent demeanour, and to have ſnatched the innocent from the calamities the other was bringing upon them?

We make ourſelves, fourthly, partakers of other men's ſins, when we induce others to ſin by our example, and, as it were, inſpire them with boldneſs thereto. What numbers allow themſelves to be governed ſolely by the example of others! They would probably have been virtuous, if they had had the good fortune to live amongſt virtuous perſons, and to have been edified by their inoffenſive and pious deportment. The enchanting patterns of juſtice, of temperance, of piety, of philanthropy, of generoſity, and magnanimity, would probably have made a laſting impreſſion on their ſouls, and impelled them to imitation; they would have ſeen themſelves obligated

to

to prize and to love the virtue and devotion which ſo beautifully ſit upon others, which render them ſo amiable in the eyes of all impartial beholders, which produce ſuch excellent fruits in the whole of their conduct, which procure them the pureſt pleaſure, and the moſt ſolid and laſting peace. They would at leaſt have been thus prevented from doing evil, and from being injurious to their neighbour. They would not have dared to do actions in the preſence of ſuch reſpectable perſons, which might bring upon them the moſt cutting reproofs, and the moſt righteous contempt. Vice would even at length have appeared deſpicable to them, and they would inſenſibly have acquired the habits of Virtue. But now, while they ſee that others, to whom probably they owe obedience and ſubmiſſion, whom they hold to be intelligent and prudent people, knowingly and wilfully ſin, that they make no ſcruple of it, that they implicitly follow their corrupt

emotions, trample under foot the commands of the Moſt High, and make the will of the world and the fleſh the only rule of their conduct; the apprehenſions that have hitherto reſtrained them from the ſervice of iniquity, vaniſh away. They ſurrender themſelves blindly to the ſagacity and judgment of thoſe whom they have choſen for the models of their conduct. They think that it cannot go ill with them while they follow ſuch examples as theſe, while they tread in the foot-ſteps of perſons to whom birth, or ſcience, or opulence, have procured a certain reputation in human ſociety, which ſeems to conceal their bad qualities, and ſhields them from the penalties they would otherwiſe have to expect. In this manner does our vicious man make himſelf partaker in the ſins of many others; and the more elevated his rank, the more eminent his endowments, the more brilliant his outward advantages, the greater is his criminality, the greater the number

of

of the unhappy he plunges with himself into ruin.

We make ourselves, fifthly, partakers of other men's sins, when we allure others to sin by our demeanour towards them, and, as it were, urge them to it. This holds particularly in regard to the affronts we put upon our neighbour. Shall he that treats his neighbour with scorn, that wounds him by looks or words of hatred, or robs him of his honour or his fame by malicious slanders; shall he bear no part in the sins which this man commits, when put out of his temper, and rouzed into vehement wrath, he returns railing for railing, endeavours to redeem his honour by unlawful and violent means, and, in the stormy emotion into which the other has thrown him, commits actions which he otherwise would have thought of with horror? Indeed the latter is not to be excused. He has evidently transgressed the injunc-

injunction of Chriſt: "Love your enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which deſpitefully uſe you, and perſecute you;" and that of the apoſtle: "Be patient toward all men." He ſhould have moderated his righteous indignation, and have left vengeance to the tribunal of a Superior Judge; he ſhould have governed himſelf, and have ſhamed his adverſary by magnanimity and beneficence. But, on the other hand, the former, who has induced him to theſe exceſſes, is as little, nay ſtill leſs to be excuſed. His crime as well as his guilt is two-fold greater.—Yet another example. Suppoſe a ſovereign ſhould torment his ſubjects; oppreſs them by heavy taxes and auſtere commands; not grant them juſtice on their juſt complaints, and frequently act cruelly with them: his ſubjects allow themſelves to be ſeduced to refuſe him; nay even the laws, that reverence and ſubmiſſion that is due to them both; ſecretly betray

betray both him and the country, or riſe up in perilous mutiny and tumult. They ſin, in not taking the lawful means to remedy theſe diſorders, and in making them far greater and more extenſive. They are criminal as traitors and rebels. But is their ſovereign leſs criminal than they, by furniſhing them with a motive thereto, ſince, by a proper diſcharge of his truſt, by an impartial adminiſtration of juſtice, by a mild and equitable government, tending to the general good, he might have prevented all theſe enormities?

We make ourſelves, moreover, partakers in other men's ſins, when we ſee the ſins and tranſgreſſions in ſilence. I know, that no ſmall degree of prudence and diſcretion is requiſite for not going too far on one ſide or the other in this reſpect. There are times and circumſtances when it is more decent and uſeful to be ſilent than to ſpeak. Reprehenſions that are made out of ſeaſon

commonly do more harm than good, and are productive of no other effect than to make him who gives them hated. We fall into companies, where, by haſty and zealous reprehenſion, we ſhould make not only ourſelves, but even Religion and Virtue, contemptible and ridiculous. In ſuch ſituations it is our duty to be ſilent; but even that ſilence may and ſhould be accompanied with ſuch ſigns of diſpleaſure as ſhall free us from all ſuſpicion of approving the wickedneſs we are obliged to ſee or to hear. It may often be very ſignificant, and occaſion more reflection in others than ample and earneſt remonſtrance. But there are likewiſe caſes where we have not theſe effects of reprehenſion to dread, if they be founded rationally and candidly, if they be given with the needful circumſpection and modeſty. In theſe caſes ſilence is ſinful, and intimates either an approbation of the ſins that are committed in our preſence, or a coolneſs in the cauſe of Religion

ligion and Virtue. It is uſually a criminal fear of man that reſtrains us from admoniſhing our neighbour of his faults, and from laying before him the impropriety of them. It is more than poſſible, indeed, that by ſo doing we may give him offence, and occaſion us the loſs of his friendſhip: for there are but few men who acknowledge with gratitude the intimation of their failings. The generality reject ſuch ſuggeſtions with diſpleaſure, and regard them as open violations of the reſpect that is due to them. But then ſhould not the cauſe of Religion and Virtue, the diſcharge of our duty, the ſalvation of our brother, be of more weight with us than the favour and affection of the man? Nay, does not even the eſteem and love we have for others engage us to warn them of every deviation, as much as in us lies, to ſave them from the ruin they are running to meet? Here belongs what our Saviour ſays: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able

to

to kill the ſoul: but rather fear Him which is able to deſtroy both ſoul and body in hell.—Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before men, him will I confeſs alſo before my Father which is heaven. But whoſoever ſhall deny me before men, him will I alſo deny before my Father which is in heaven." And how expreſs is the command of God on this head, which we read in his prophet Ezekiel: "When I ſay unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou ſhalt ſurely die; if thou doſt not ſpeak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man ſhall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." It may be ſaid, that this delinqnency was greater under the peculiar government which God adminiſtered over his antient people, as it rendered a man guilty of high treaſon againſt God, the king of Iſrael. But, to maintain the honour of the Moſt High, and to ſupport the reverence due to his laws, is of eternal and unchangeable obligation, binding upon us

at

at all times, and from which nothing is able to abſolve us. But how can we be ſaid to comply with it, if we hear the ſacred name of God blaſphemed, if we ſee his commands deſpiſed and his benefits abuſed, and yet remain indifferent and ſilent to it all? And how peculiarly criminal muſt this ſilence be, if, by the diſcovery of a baſe deſign, we might have prevented the execution of it, or if, by due remonſtrances, we might have kept a man from the commiſſion of ſin!

But we make ourſelves ſtill greater partakers in other men's ſins, when we not only are ſilent to the ſins that others commit, but openly vindicate, juſtify, or even applaud them. By this the ſinner is ſtrengthened in his iniquity; he is freed from the remorſes of conſcience, which elſe would torment him. We therefore make ſinning ſit eaſier upon him. He loſes by degrees the ſenſe of ſhame, which, but

but for us, would not have allowed him to continue his evil practices, and to proceed farther in his vicious carreer; at length he comes to boaſt of his enormities, and ſeeks by ſuch actions approbation and praiſe, as ought to cover him with ſhame and confuſion. And how common is this way of partaking in the ſins that others commit! In one inſtance it is our friends and relations that have ſinned! Blinded by ſelf-love, we ſee not their faults; we endeavour, at leaſt, to extenuate them by every means we can deviſe, and then paſs them for mere inadvertencies and neglects. We would not be troubled by them, or diſquieted by the remembrance of their pernicious effects. Frequently we are aſhamed of their miſconduct, and endeavour to hide it, from fear leſt our own honour ſhould be ſullied by it. Thus we excuſe ourſelves for juſtifying others. We do not recollect the important words of our good Redeemer: "He that loveth father

or

or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth ſon or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." In another inſtance, it is ſuperiors on whom a man, on one or another account, depends, whoſe behaviour deſerves reproof. But he is afraid of affronting him, and thus expoſing himſelf to the danger of loſing his ſmiles. He rather does all he can to pleaſe him; and, becauſe flattery commonly does much in attaining this end, he readily applies to that, without bluſhing at the falſhood and meanneſs of which he incurs the guilt. He therefore is kind to their groſſeſt faults, and knows how to give a colour to their moſt flagrant tranſgreſſions, which makes them, if not praiſe-worthy, at leaſt indifferent and free from blame. But is this to be called any thing elſe than nurſing the follies and ſins of the world, againſt the conviction of one's own underſtanding, and to comfort the ſlaves of vice in their corrupt diſpoſitions?

Thus a man likewiſe makes himſelf partaker of other men's ſins, when he ſpreads and avows ſuch opinions as ſap the foundations of morality, and are favourable to licentiouſneſs and impiety; when he countenances the prejudices that are brought againſt the practice of virtue and real Chriſtianity; when, inſtead of refuting, he ſtrives by every argument of ſophiſtry, to confirm them, and to ſupport them in all their pernicious effects; when, in ſhort, he endeavours to make it contemptible by deriſion, and to weaken the demonſtrations of its truth and divinity. What would reſtrain the ſinner from giving full ſcope to all the exceſſes which accord with his temperament and predominant paſſions, if he held the arguments for his obligation to virtue as weak and invalid; if he regarded the duties which reaſon and Revelation enjoin, as human inventions, which have no other end in view but to keep the vulgar in awe, and to prevent univerſal diſorder? Is

it not theſe errors and prejudices that quiet the ſinner, that lull him into ſecurity, and deprive the ſtruggles and ſtings of his conſcience from having their due effect? All the remonſtrances, all the exhortations, all the promiſes and threats, that God has delivered in his word to mankind, are very often unable to reclaim them from ſin and corruption; how much leſs would they heſitate to continue their courſe undaunted, if they once could bring themſelves to doubt of the divine origin of thoſe remonſtrances, thoſe exhortations, thoſe promiſes and threats, or reject them as the work of artifice and fraud, undeſerving the leaſt earneſt or ſerious regard? What bounds would they fear to tranſgreſs, what commands would they revere, if they had once got ſo far, that their hardened hearts could no longer be moved by the majeſty of God, and the authority of his ſacred laws? Oh, what irreparable miſchief have thoſe erroneous and deſtructive opi-

nions already done in the province of piety and virtue! How great the number of the miſerable, who, blinded by them, have ruſhed upon deſtruction! And what deplorable havock do they ſtill occaſion among mankind! Of what innumerable ſins do they render themſelves partakers, who uphold ſuch errors, who embelliſh them with fallacious eloquence and miſapplied wit, and thus make them probable and palatable to ſuch as either cannot, or will not, take a cloſer ſurvey of the ſubject!

Laſtly, we make ourſelves partakers in other men's ſins, when we do not, as much as in us lies, endeavour to prevent them. A couple of particular inſtances will beſt develope what I mean. A poor man, deſtitute of all human aſſiſtance, tormented day and night with cares for the morrow's bread, who can deviſe no means for procuring ſupport in an honeſt way, falls at length into the extremeſt diſtreſs, and becomes

comes weary of life. The rich man knows his neceſſity; he can reſcue him from the fangs of wretchedneſs without hurting himſelf, and render him happy by affording him a little relief; but his avarice or his inſenſibility with-hold him from it. The poor man ſinks into total deſpondency, finds courage in deſperation, and either has recourſe to unlawful means for prolonging his life, or violently diſburdens himſelf of it. Shall the rich man in this caſe be guiltleſs? Shall he have no ſhare in the crime he might have prevented by ſo ſmall an exertion of bounty?—One inſtance more: Suppoſe we diſcover that one of our acquaintance frequents bad company, and in fooliſh levity is approaching the toils of ſin which temptation ſpreads along his path. He is on the way to loſe his innocence, and with it the peace of his ſoul, to become a prey to voluptuouſneſs, and hurrying to the verge of deſtruction. But nobody takes up his caſe; nobody warns him of the

danger he is every inſtant approaching. Probably he would have hearkened to the friendly caution; probably he would have renounced the ſociety of ſinners, and with redoubled ardour have walked the way of righteouſneſs. But our ſloth, our coldneſs, have furthered his ruin, and deprived him of the moſt efficacious means of deliverance. Have we any right to complain if a part of his merited puniſhment is imputed to us, if we muſt bear the guilt of ſin in common with him?

"Lord! who can tell how oft he offendeth? Oh cleanſe thou me from my ſecret ſins!" Who of us does not feel himſelf compelled to break out in this confeſſion and prayer, on laying the foregoing reflections to heart, on applying them home, and obſerving how eaſy it is to become partaker in other men's ſins, and in what various ways it may happen? Yes, this is the firſt uſe you are to make of

theſe

theſe conſiderations, if you would render them ſalutary to you. They muſt animate you to an impartial ſcrutiny into your heart and life. Examine then your former conduct; compare it with the important duty we have now been enforcing; aſk yourſelves how you have hitherto fulfilled it, and in what particulars you have acted againſt it. What a ſeries of ſins, of failings, of crimes and weakneſſes, you will detect in this inquiry! How much negligence, how much fear of man, how much criminal compliance, will your conſcience bring againſt you! Of how much coldneſs in your jealouſy for the honour of God, of how much unconcern for the eternal ſalvation of your neighbour, will it accuſe you! Give full ſcope to the ſalutary ſhame and confuſion that muſt ariſe from theſe ideas. Humble yourſelves in the preſence of God, confeſs your demerits, lay hold with penitential faith on the grace our Redeemer has promiſed the ſinner, on his

ſincerely deploring his ſins, and his firm reſolution to commit them no more.

But alſo let theſe meditations then lead you to beſtow a ſtrict attention on all the parts of your future behaviour, to a circumſpect and inoffenſive conduct. Keep a conſtant guard over yourſelf, and exert your utmoſt endeavours to adjuſt all your words and works to the precepts of Religion, the dictates of virtue. Call frequently to mind the various connexions in which you ſtand towards other men, the duties to which you are bound in regard to their ſpiritual and eternal welfare, and the great utility or detriment you may procure them in reference to it. Never loſe ſight of the glorious purpoſe for which you are created, redeemed, and called to Chriſtianity; and walk as burning and ſhining lights in the midſt of a corrupted world. Do you find difficulties and obſtacles in the diſcharge of this duty, as muſt

muſt be the caſe in the preſent ſtate of things; then fly to the ſanctuary of the Lord your God, and repeatedly implore him, with David: "Try me, O God! and ſeek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedneſs in me; and lead me in the way everlaſting."

THE

THE

DUTY

OF

BROTHERLY REPREHENSIONS.

We exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly. 1 Theſſal. v. 14

THE DUTY OF BROTHERLY REPREHENSIONS.

CHRISTIANITY enjoins us ſeveral duties which ſeem almoſt to have ſlipped out of notice, and which are daily counteracted without reproach or even obſervation, becauſe it is groundleſsly imagined that they are only binding on certain particular perſons, and are not of univerſal obligation. Thus every Chriſtian is bound, in proportion to his capacity and opportunities, to inſtruct the ignorant, to reclaim the wandering, to comfort the afflicted, to viſit

viſit the ſick, and to afford them the needful ſuccours according to his means. He is eſpecially obliged to contribute, to the utmoſt of his ability, to the propagation and advancement of truth, of piety, and virtue. The precepts and commands relating to this, which we meet with in Holy Scripture, are addreſſed to all the confeſſors of Jeſus, without diſtinction of ſtates and conditions of life; and the reaſons on which theſe injunctions are enforced, are of equal authority and weight to every Chriſtian. But how ſeldom do we attend to theſe obligations! How little pains do men take to acquit themſelves of them! What is more common than for a man to ſhake them off, by conſidering them as the buſineſs of thoſe alone who have devoted themſelves to the clerical function. This is juſt the caſe with the important duty enjoined us in the text: "We exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly;" or correct them that will not be ſubmiſſive to order,

order, who lead a diſorderly life, at variance with the laws of the Goſpel. No man doubts, that rulers and magiſtrates, preachers and preceptors, parents and guardians, are authorized and bound to admoniſh their ſubjects or ſuitors, their hearers, their children and wards, of their ſins and failings, and to exhort them to amendment. But here in general they ſtop. Farther than this they do not extend this important duty, which nevertheleſs is of ſo large a compaſs. They forget, that it is of univerſal obligation, and that we all, as men and as Chriſtians, are mutually bound to admoniſh, to correct, and to caution each other; and thereby to promote our preſent and future happineſs. But the more this duty is neglected, and the greater the damage that ariſes from this neglect, or the defective obſervance of it; ſo much the leſs needleſs or ſuperfluous will be the inſtruction I now mean to deliver on brotherly reprehenſions. In this

this view two articles will employ our attention.

In the former, I will ſtate the neceſſity of brotherly reprehenſion, or demonſtrate that it is our bounden duty.

In the other, I will ſhew how this reprehenſion is to be given, as well as how it is to be taken.

Brotherly reprehenſions are neceſſary, and we are obligated to them, becauſe God has expreſsly commanded them in his word; becauſe they are eſſential properties of the love of our neighbour; becauſe by them we increaſe our own utility, as we draw upon ourſelves the greateſt miſchiefs by the neglect of them.

I ſay, firſt, brotherly reprehenſions are neceſſary, and we are obligated to them, becauſe God has expreſsly commanded them

them in his word. Thus he ſays by Moſes: "Thou ſhalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou ſhalt in any wiſe rebuke thy neighbour, and not ſuffer ſin upon him." And how reiterated, how plain, how expreſs are the leſſons, in this reſpect, given us by the Apoſtles of our Lord: "Exhort one another daily," ſays Saint Paul, "while it is called to-day; leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin." "Let us conſider one another to provoke unto love, and to good works." "If a man be overtaken in a fault," ſays the ſame Apoſtle to the Galatians, "reſtore ſuch an one in the ſpirit of meekneſs." "Have no fellowſhip," ſays he to the Chriſtians at Epheſus, "with the unfruitful works of darkneſs, but rather reprove them;" and in our text we hear him ſaying, "We exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly." How then can we, without rendering ourſelves guilty of the moſt glaring diſobedience to-

wards God, neglect a duty which we are ſo frequently and ſo expreſsly enjoined?

Brotherly reprehenſions are, farther, neceſſary, and we are obligated to them, becauſe they are eſſential properties of the love of our neighbour, which is the grand commandment of the Chriſtian law. You know, how forcibly the love of one another is inculcated upon Chriſtians, and how much it comprehends. "He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." "By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye have love one to another." We muſt, according to the precept of the Apoſtle John, "not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." "This," ſays the bleſſed Jeſus, "is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." But what is the ſignification of loving our neighbour, unleſs it be heartily to deſire his happineſs,

and

and to ſtrive to promote it to the utmoſt of our power? But is not his happineſs principally founded on the proper and ſedate frame of his heart and conduct? Can we therefore earneſtly be deſirous of his happineſs, and actually ſtrive to promote it, if we allow him to proceed on the way of ſin and vice, which muſt neceſſarily bring him to miſery, without admonition and warning? And how did Chriſt evince his love to mankind, which is to be the model of ours? Did he content himſelf with feeding the hungry, with giving ſight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, health to the ſick, and life to the dead? No! He inſtructed the ignorant, he ſought the loſt, he went after the devious, to bring them to the better way, he reproved the ſinful, he called them to repentance, and did every thing for their converſion, and for rendering them happy. Would we then follow his example, or, which is the very ſame thing, would we rightfully bear the name

of Chriſtians: then muſt we not only conſult the bodily, but alſo the ſpiritual welfare of our neighbour. We muſt not only care for his earthly, but alſo for his eternal happineſs. We muſt not only warn him of the dangers that menace his property, his honour, his life, but much rather of the peril into which ſin and wickedneſs caſt him. We muſt ſtrive to deliver his immortal ſoul, and to ſnatch him from everlaſting perdition. But how can we do this, if we let him quietly and uninterruptedly follow his perverted deſires, if we do not correct him for his tranſgreſſions, and do not ſtrive by all means to reſtore him to reaſon?

Brotherly reprehenſions are, thirdly, neceſſary, and we are obligated to them, becauſe we ourſelves receive a various and conſiderable utility from them, which ſelf-love ſhould induce us to ſeek. We cannot labour duly at the ſalvation of our brother,

ther, without at the ſame time promoting our own. While we remind him of his duty, while we repreſent to him the ſhame and the miſchief of vice, and ſtrive to convince him of the propriety, the neceſſity, and the beauty of virtue, we are confirming ourſelves in the hatred of evil and the love of good; and we thence acquire new motives for ſedulouſly avoiding that, and for proſecuting this with invigorated zeal. Would we evince ourſelves in this reſpect the honeſt friends of our neighbour; then may we always, in ſimilar caſes, expect the ſame proofs of friendſhip from others. They will direct us aright if we wander aſtray; they will ſhew us the faults which our ſelf-love conceals; if we begin to grow negligent and relaxed, they will rouze and encourage us to a firm proſecution of our virtuous courſe. And where is the man that is not often in need of this help? Should we then demur to act ſo by others, as we would wiſh them to act by us? Are

we ſo happy as to find that our remonſtrances and corrections obtain a hearing; how much ſhall we be thanked of him whom we have thus reformed! "Rebuke a wiſe man," ſays Solomon, "and he will love thee." "He that rebuketh a man afterwards ſhall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue." Nay, what a glorious recompenſe may we hope for from God, if we faithfully comply with this duty! "God," as the Apoſtle tells us, "is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love." How then can he forget this work which ſo far tranſcends all other kinds of good-works, as the ſoul excells the body, as eternity is ſuperior to time? Shall no draught of cold water that is given to a Chriſtian out of Chriſtian love, go unrewarded? Then what reward has he not to expect, who, in upright intentions, earneſtly endeavours to bring a wanderer to the knowledge of truth, or conducts a ſinner to the way of righteouſneſs! Hear,

what a ſtreſs is laid upon this duty by St. James. "He which converteth the ſinner from the error of his way, ſhall ſave a ſoul from death, and ſhall hide a multitude of ſins." Can we then, unleſs we hate ourſelves, heſitate to fulfill a duty which not only is ſo noble and excellent in itſelf, but draws after it ſo many bleſſed effects?

Brotherly reprehenſions are, laſtly, neceſſary, and we are obligated to them, becauſe we cannot neglect them, without burdening ourſelves with the heavieſt penalty. Is he who leaves the hungry to die, without affording him help, in all juſtice accounted a murderer; how much rather does he deſerve that name, who ſees, as it were, his brother on the brink of an abyſs, on the verge of eternal perdition, without giving him warning, or ſnatching him from it! Does he who converts a ſinner from the error of his ways, deliver a ſoul from death;

then he who does it not when he has it in his power, is chargeable in all reaſon with being the cauſe of his ruin. What a crime in the ſight of heaven! We have heard it already from the mouth of God: "Thou ſhalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou ſhalt in any wiſe rebuke thy neighbour, and not ſuffer ſin upon him." And whatever God repreſents to the Prophets in reference to the people at large, whoſe teachers they are, relates in a certain ſenſe to every perſon in reference to his friends, his acquaintance, and relations. "O ſon of man! I have ſet thee a watchman to the houſe of Iſrael." O thou father of a family! may the ſame thing be juſtly ſaid, I have ſet thee a watchman over thy children and dependants. O man, I have eſtabliſhed thee a watchman over the men with whom thou art in a cloſe connection. "Thou ſhalt warn them from me. When I ſay unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou ſhalt ſurely die; if thou doſt not ſpeak to warn

the

the wicked from his way, that wicked man ſhall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." How important, how ſacred muſt that duty be, to the omiſſion whereof ſuch penalties are annexed! After all this, can we have the leaſt doubt that we are bound in the ſtricteſt manner to the diſcharge of this duty?

But how, you may probably ſay, how are we to perform it? How are we to ſurmount the obſtacles that ſtand in the way of it? I will give you ſome rules for your behaviour in this reſpect, the obſervance whereof will infallibly facilitate the buſineſs. I will firſt ſhew you how we are to correct others, and afterwards how we are to accept the corrections of others.

Our reprehenſions muſt, before all things, be well grounded. We muſt carefully beware of making a man ſuch reproaches as he

he does not deſerve, or of charging him with faults and inadvertencies from which he is free. Neither are we to reprove him for things that are not bad in themſelves, but are indifferent and lawful, though they may not perhaps be conformable with our taſte and with our diſpoſitions. This would diſcover more of an unbecoming and petulant inclination to find fault, than an earneſt deſire of improving our neighbour, and we ſhould thus render ourſelves ſuſpected, and liable to find but little attention when our reproofs were well founded and important. We muſt here however obſerve two things. We may be doubtful whether ſuch a perſon has committed this or the other fault. In that caſe, we may not indeed abſolutely acquit him of it. But we may give him to underſtand the uneaſineſs this uncertainty occaſions us on his account, and the wiſh that we may find it to have no foundation; and even where no direct reprehenſion is allowable, affectionate

tionate warnings and intreaties may be uſed with advantage. Again, things which are indifferent in themſelves may ceaſe to be ſo, when we do not obſerve a proper moderation in their behalf. The moſt innocent pleaſures become ſinful, when we are too ſtrongly addicted to them, when we have ſo habituated ourſelves to them, that we can ſcarcely do without them, or when we neglect our duty for their ſake. To this head belong dreſs, play, company, the reading of ſuch books as tend more to amuſement than inſtruction and information, and the like. Muſt not brotherly reprehenſion then be likewiſe neceſſary and profitable in regard to ſuch things? A young man, for inſtance, keeps himſelf clear of all the extravagancies of youth, which may injure his reputation, his health, and his future proſperity. He frequents no companies where the rules of ſobriety and good-manners are ever infringed, where Religion and virtue are turned into ridicule.

ridicule. No man can properly ſay that he does any harm. But as little can a man pretend that he does any good. It is mere trifles and frivolities that employ him from morning to night, and the beſt years of his life paſs unimproved away. What a happineſs would it be for him, if he had a friend, who ſhould remind him of the ends of his being, repreſent to him the danger of ſuch a thoughtleſs and empty life, the value of time, the conſequence of the human ſoul, and endeavour to convince him that it is as criminal to neglect the good we may and ought to do, as to commit the evil we ought to avoid! What a happineſs, if his friend ſhould reprove him for the indifference with which he treats the moſt important concerns, for the careleſſneſs he indulges in regard to his everlaſting ſalvation and his future account!

Would we obtain a hearing to our reprehenſions, and render them of real utility; we

we muſt, ſecondly, be free from thoſe faults we reprehend in others. I will not affirm, that we may not undertake this duty, till we are unblamable in all reſpects, and have reached the higheſt degree of holineſs. Were this the condition; then ſhould we never comply with this duty while we remain on earth. For, "who can ſay, I have made my heart clean; I am pure from all ſin?" "In many things we offend all." But there is a great difference between faults which a man rarely falls into, which he never commits but from miſtake, againſt his inclination, and to his utmoſt affliction, and thoſe which a man daily and deliberately gives into, which he commits knowingly and on purpoſe, to which he is accuſtomed, and to which he willingly ſubmits. Theſe, and not the former, diſqualify us for admoniſhing our neighbour of his tranſgreſſions, and reprehending him for them. At leaſt, in the generality of caſes, it deprives our reproof of all its weight, and renders

renders it entirely fruitleſs. For how abſurd would it be for the proud to pretend to any zeal againſt haughtineſs and vanity, for the avaricious to caution us againſt an inordinate love of worldly goods, for the voluptuary to recommend temperance, and to warn us to flee from the luſts of the fleſh, for the petulant and revengeful to preach up meekneſs and forbearance! How much muſt the conduct of ſuch perſons enervate the force of their reproof, though it were never ſo ſolidly founded! Would they not, thus will the majority of mankind conclude, would they not themſelves avoid theſe faults and vices, if they actually thought them ſo dangerous and hurtful as they maintain them to be? In this regard, our Saviour ſays: "How wilt thou ſay to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, firſt caſt out the beam out of thine own eye; and then ſhalt thou ſee clearly to caſt out the mote out of thy brother's eye." However,

ever, there are caſes, where we may reprehend, with propriety and utility, the very faults in others which we have ourſelves. When we acknowledge and bewail our faults, when we ſigh under the burden of their baleful effects, when we are ſincerely reſolved to forſake them, and when we actually take pains to amend; then, from our own dreadful experience, we may derive the ſtrongeſt motives for warning others of the ſame, and encourage others, as well as ourſelves, to maintain the war againſt them. This muſt particularly be, when the faults are ſuch as we have committed in ſociety with others, or have furniſhed them with inducements and opportunities to commit them.

Brotherly admonitions and reprehenſions muſt, thirdly, be given in a friendly and affectionate manner, if we would have them uſeful. A ſincere and hearty deſire to promote the advantage of our neighbour, muſt

muſt be both their ſource and their rule. If we are impelled by Chriſtian love to reprove our deviating and failing brother, we ſhall not ſo much endeavour to ſhame, confound, and vex him, as to awaken him to amendment, and to ſnatch him from the danger or misfortune into which he is like to fall. We ſhall not hold up his faults to him in a jeering and taunting manner, but avoid every thing that may incite his anger or diſpleaſure againſt us. Our mien, the tone of our voice, our whole behaviour towards him will betray no ſecret joy at his frailties, no pride on account of our ſuperior virtue, but evince a tender compaſſion and a real intereſt. We ſhall not proceed as if we wanted to draw out all the circumſtances of the bad deed he has done, or the bad habits he has, for ſatiſfying a wayward curioſity, but ſo as to bring him to reflect on his moral condition, and to the knowledge of himſelf. We ſhall firſt endeavour to win his affec-

tion,

fection, to remove whatever prejudice he may have formed againſt us, ere we ſet about convincing him of the criminality of his conduct, and to move him by the force of our arguments to make an alteration in it. We ſha l give him to know how great an intereſt we take in his welfare; how ardently we wiſh him both preſent and future felicity; how nearly it goes to our heart when we ſee him do or omit any thing that impedes it, that may draw upon him contempt, ignominy, uneaſineſs, or, which is more than all, the diſpleaſure of the Sovereign Being. Theſe diſpoſitions will not allow us to reprimand him in an authoritative manner, or in harſh and contemptuous terms. Friendſhip and mild perſuaſion will accompany each remonſtrance; and we ſhall not appeal to ourſelves, but to the nature of the caſe itſelf, and to the convincing arguments of reaſon and Religion. Theſe very diſpoſitions will teach us tenderneſs and moderation. We

ſhall carefully ſhun all the petulance and irritation which in moſt caſes would render our endeavours fruitleſs, and ſhall anſwer every objection and cavil of him we reprove in the ſpirit of meekneſs. Laſtly, if we are animated by the real love of our neighbour, we ſhall not ſuffer ourſelves to be daunted by the firſt unſucceſsful attempt. We ſhall frequently return to the charge unwearied, and comfort ourſelves with the hope that probably, at another time, and under other circumſtances, our repreſentations may have better effects. In this reſpect we have the precept of an Apoſtle: "Count him [whom you reprove] not as an enemy, but admoniſh him as a brother." "Reſtore ſuch an one in the ſpirit of meekneſs."

Brotherly reprehenſions muſt, fourthly, be adminiſtered ſeaſonably and with diſcretion, if we would have them productive. It is by no means indifferent, when and in what

what circumſtances we admoniſh another of his faults, and rouze him to reform. Do we reprove our friend in the preſence of perſons with whom he is in habits of familiar intercourſe, on whoſe taciturnity he cannot rely, or who are uſed to judge with ſeverity, and whoſe friendſhip and eſteem may be eaſily loſt; in that caſe we ſhall hardly reach our aim. We may indeed ſhame and confound, but probably not correct him. It is far more likely that we ſhall give him an occaſion, either to deny the faults which in other circumſtances he would perhaps have confeſſed and lamented, or, to excuſe and to juſtify them by every kind of evaſion; and he will now endeavour to conceal his paſt tranſgreſſions by an accumulation of more, namely, of ſubterfuges, prevarications, and lyes. Juſt as little, nay, ſtill leſs may we hope to ſucceed, if we take him under any vehement agitation of mind. The moſt ſolemn truths we may then preſent to him, will make little or no

impreſſion on his heart, becauſe the man is bewildered by paſſion, and every thing appears to him in a falſe point of view. We muſt now treat him as a perſon labouring under a diſeaſe, who has no command of himſelf, and can pay no regard to the moſt reaſonable propoſals, but will probably be more diſtempered by them, till the heat of his fever be allayed, and Reaſon reſume her empire. I would not be underſtood as if, in ſuch caſes, we were to be wholly indifferent and inactive. We may and ſhould intimate our diſpleaſure at the tranſports our acquaintance or our friend allows himſelf in; we may make him perceive our compaſſion at the diſordered and furious condition in which we find him, and our fears of the dangerous effects it may have; we may ſtrive to ſoften and melt his heart by affectionate and repeated intreaties, by the tendereſt demonſtrations of friendſhip, or turn his attention to different matters, and thereby divert him from his rage. We may

may even, between whiles, remind him, in few but emphatical words, of ſome weighty declaration of Scripture; and the more affecting, the more unexpected it is, the more likely it will be to break the chain of his wild conceptions, to ſhake his ſoul, and, like a ſtroke of lightning, diſpel the gloom that ſurrounds his ſpirit. In general, however, in ſuch caſes, gentleneſs is to be preferred to ſeverity, and all poſſible circumſpection muſt be uſed; though, if it be parents that have to do with their children, or ſuperiors with their inferiors, it may often happen that the regards and the proper authority of the former may be capable of curbing the paſſions of the latter, by ſomewhat harſher meaſures, and impoſe a more powerful reſtraint on the impetuoſity of their rage. Would you acquit yourſelves of the duty we are now recommending, in the fitteſt and moſt favourable circumſtances: then

chuſe a time when your acquaintance, your friend, is of a calm and quiet poſſeſſion of mind; when you ſee him inclined and diſpoſed to ſerioufneſs, to reflection, to continued meditation; when you perceive that the doctrines of Religion, or particular occurrences and events, have made a good impreſſion on him, and have opened a paſſage to his heart for the voice of truth and conſcience. Do it then, when he is ſenſible to the value of your friendſhip, and converſes with you in the ſimplicity of his ſoul; or when, humbled by ſome malady, by the loſs of whatever was dear to him, by other adverſities, he is forcibly reminded of the vanity of all earthly things; or even when he has received ſome ſtriking benefits or bleſſings from the hand of God, and enjoys with gladneſs the tokens of his favour. Then ſtrive to call his attention to the things that conduce to his real welfare, and to his moral improvement. Then bring to his mind the various obligations

towards

towards God and man; repreſent to him the errors of his former deportment; and do what you can to move him to a ſalutary remorſe, and to bring him back from his follies: ſo will your endeavours, under the bleſſing of God, if not always, yet certainly in very many inſtances, be attended with the moſt deſirable effects.

You know now how we are to rebuke our brethren, if we would do them real ſervice, and act according to our duty. Nothing more remains, but briefly to preſent you with ſome directions how you are to receive the reprehenſions you meet with yourſelves, how you are to regard and to uſe them.

The firſt rule is this: Take them with meekneſs, with a compoſed and quiet mind. Beware of taking that for an affront which in fact is the ſtrongeſt mark of real friend-

ſhip. Be not angry with him who reminds you of your failings. Conſider, that it is his duty to do ſo, and that, by the neglect of it, he would bring upon himſelf the divine diſpleaſure and the ſevereſt puniſhment. Allow that, in the way and manner of his reprehenſions, he does not employ all the circumſpection and prudence he might; allow, that he does not always ſelect the fitteſt occaſions thereto; allow, that his zeal for your welfare carries him to too great a ſeverity: yet let not this prevent you from hearkening to his admonitions and remonſtrances with due attention and with a tranquil ſpirit, ſince at all events you may reap advantage from them. And why ſhould we act leſs reaſonably in ſuch caſes than we do in others of a far inferior nature? Do we take it as an affront, do we fret and fume, when a man warns us of the loſs of our temporal property, when he diſcovers to us the baſe deſigns of an enemy, when he ſupplies us with the means of advanc-

ing

ing our outward fortune, when he gives us the moſt wholeſome preſcriptions for recovering our health and our powers, or when he redeems our life from apparent danger? How willingly do we liſten to ſuch admonitions and cautions! How carefully do we take them to heart! How highly do we eſteem him by whom they are beſtowed, and how little are we concerned about the words and expreſſions he has uſed to convey them! And ſhall we not be ſtill more thus diſpoſed, when a man warns us of ſin, which of all evils is the greateſt and worſt; when he ſhews us the danger to which our immortal ſpirit is expoſed; when he beſeeches us not to do that which we cannot do without bidding farewell to ſerenity of mind, to peace of conſcience, to the favour of God, and the hope of eternal life? Do ſuch repreſentations, ſuch warnings, ſuch intreaties, deſerve our diſpleaſure? Do they not, on the contrary, merit even then our gratitude, when they reſt

on

on an impure foundation, or are exhibited in ſiniſter views? Are not the liberal reprehenſions of a friend infinitely more valuable than the praiſes of a mean adulator? "Open, [or frank] rebuke," ſays the wiſe king, "is better than ſecret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kiſſes of an enemy are deceitful."

The ſecond rule of behaviour is this: Accept the reprehenſions of your brother with humility. Never forget how eaſy it is for men to miſtake and fail, how readily they may decline from the path of virtue, how imperceptibly they may be drawn into the ways of ſin, if they be not ever vigilant over themſelves, and flee from every temptation to evil. Conſtantly reflect, that our heart is but too much diſpoſed to deceive itſelf, that we uſually account ourſelves better than we are, that we ſeldom notice what is bad and reprehenſible in our character and our conduct, and that it is much

harder to detect our own failings than the failings of other men, and to judge of them according to real complexion. Impoſe therefore ſilence on pride and ſelf-love, when you are admoniſhed, or cautioned, or reprehended by others. Let it never depend on the decree of theſe partial and lying judges, whether theſe admonitions, theſe cautions, or theſe reprehenſions, are well-founded, or not. Seek not to baffle or weaken them by idle excuſes, by artful ſophiſtry, and tergiverſation; but examine your heart, conſider your ways, and hearken to the voice of conſcience and truth. It is but an empty prejudice to imagine that your honour is concerned to appear better than you really are. All the endeavours you uſe to this end, will generally be in vain, and you will far ſooner impoſe on yourſelf than on others. But this is real honour, this is to be called a juſt and noble way of thinking, to confeſs our treſpaſſes and errors without compulſion, to condemn ourſelves

ſelves for them, and to labour at amend-ment.

And this is the third and laſt rule we have to enjoin you in this behalf. Turn the ſuggeſtions and reprehenſions of your brother to real advantage. Be not ſo much concerned to know whether they proceed from true affection and friendſhip, and in what intentions they were given, as how you may render them uſeful to you, how you may thence become wiſer and better. Conſider, that the heart of the ſinner be-comes hardened the more, and that it is ſo much the more difficult for him to forſake his deviations, and to return to the path of virtue, the oftener he allows himſelf to be admoniſhed, and cautioned, and repre-hended in vain. Conſider, how much it will torment you hereafter in the hour of death, how much it will torment you in eternity, if you are obliged to make your-ſelf ſuch reproaches as theſe: I have often

enough

enough been warned of ſin, I have ſometimes been reproved with affection, ſometimes with ſeverity; but I deſpiſed the cautions, the reprehenſions, of my guide and my companion, my teacher and my friend; I have rejected them with ſcorn, I have put away from me, as my enemy, him who was endeavouring to deliver me, and ruſhed headlong down the precipice he cautioned me to ſhun. It is now too late to avoid it; now is the day of ſalvation paſt; now I experience the truth of that ſaying of the judicious king: He that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, ſhall ſuddenly be deſtroyed, and that without remedy. Oh! would you put yourſelves out of the reach of theſe tormenting reproaches; then attend to the ſalutary precepts we have juſt been giving. Admoniſh one another daily, while it is called to-day, leſt any of you be hardened by the deceitfulneſs of ſin; and receive theſe exhortations with meekneſs, with humility,

and

and with a ſincere intention to correct your-ſelves by them. How much will you facilitate the duties of Chriſtianity to yourſelves! How happily will you vanquiſh all the enemies of your ſalvation, if you attack them with united forces! How great will your proficiency in virtue and piety be, if you incite one another, by your example and by friendly ſuggeſtions, to Chriſtian love and to all good works! What a raviſhing joy will it be to you hereafter, when you ſhall recollect in the future world theſe approved demonſtrations of unfeigned friendſhip, and mutually and eternally enjoy their glorious fruits!

HOW

HOW EVERY MAN MAY AND OUGHT TO

LABOUR

AT PROMOTING THE

GENERAL GOOD.

Look not every man on his own things, but every man alſo on the things of others.

Philipp. ii. 4.

HOW EVERY MAN MAY AND OUGHT TO

LABOUR

AT PROMOTING THE

GENERAL GOOD.

WE have often already had occaſion to obſerve, that, both as men and as Chriſtians, we are bound to promote, according to our means, the general benefit of the human and Chriſtian ſociety to which we belong; and if once we conſider the variety and ſtrength of the ties by which we are connected together in theſe two reſpects, it is not difficult for us to perceive that we have the moſt forcible reaſons for taking upon us this generally uſeful character. But probably to many it ſeems no eaſy matter to get clear and juſt conceptions of the way and manner how this ob-

ligation is to be put in practice. Probably ſome may actually perform it in the moſt laudable manner, and yet are all the while complaining that their circumſtances put it out of their power to do ſo; and thus fail of perceiving the value their beſt endeavours actually poſſeſs, and miſs that ſentiment of it which would animate them chearfully to continue in ſo doing, and even reward them for it. Probably numbers may ſay to themſelves; "Yes, if I were a ruler or a ſtateſman; if I were a public teacher; if I filled ſuch a ſtation among my brethren, as ſhould give me the right and authority to labour at the public welfare, to iſſue ſalutary ordinances for the good of my fellow-citizens, or to compell them to the ſtrict obſervance of thoſe already provided to adminiſter right and juſtice in the public inſtitutions for relieving the poor, in defending the widow and the orphan, and in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments according to merit; if I had the capacity

or

or the opportunities for ſerving the government and the realm by my advice, to inſpect and to provide for the emergencies of the ſtate at large, or, by my leſſons, to form the minds and the hearts of the riſing generation, and had ſome influence on the amelioration of the predominant courſes of thought and life: then I might, then I would, with the greateſt pleaſure labour at the general benefit, and perhaps, for its ſake, entirely forget myſelf and my own private advantage. But how can I do this, as my conſequence is ſo little, that I have no power and authority at all over others, and paſs my days in obſcurity? I carry on a low contemptible trade, an ordinary occupation; I am employed in a certain kind of buſineſs, which I am forced to conſider more as a means for procuring a maintenance for myſelf and my family, than as a branch of the public weal; or I am in the ſervice of others, and muſt very often devote myſelf to matters that are ſcarcely

worth the attention of a reaſonable being. How limited therefore are my means of doing good! How can I propoſe to myſelf ſo grand an aim as that of the general benefit? And how could I be able to reach it in my condition? Such reflections have probably preſented themſelves to many of you, when we would excite you to a generally uſeful and noble behaviour, when we have addreſſed you with the Apoſtle: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man alſo on the things of others;" and there can be no doubt but theſe reflections have in many rendered ſuch excitations fruitleſs, and diveſted them of all encouragement to the obſervance of this precept. It is therefore my intention now to meet theſe difficulties and objections, and to endeavour to give you juſter and plainer ideas of the ſubject. To this end, I ſhall do two things.

Firſt, I ſhall ſhew you, in a few remarks, how every man, without diſtinction of ſtation and calling, may and ought to labour at the general good. Afterwards I will deduce from them ſome particular practical reſults or rules of conduct.

The firſt remark is this: The general good is a very complex matter. It comprehends the good of each individual member of the whole ſociety taken together, and conſiſts in the combination of all the particular endeavours, which each individual, in his ſtation and calling, exerts to do that, which, in virtue of it, he ought to do. No one can, for himſelf alone, maintain the reverence due to the laws, to order, to the peace, the ſecurity, the welfare of the whole ſociety, and bring it to a certain degree of perfection. But, when each individual for himſelf ſubmits to the laws, and inviolably obſerves them, then ſtands

the law in general reverence. When each for himſelf is obedient to the preſcriptions of order, then order prevails in the whole ſociety. When each lives peaceably and tractably with his friends, his acquaintance, his relations and neighbours, then is the public peace ſecured. When each man faithfully fills the place allotted him, and punctiliouſly performs the duties it implies; then an excellent harmony muſt neceſſarily pervade the whole. Human or civil ſociety, in this reſpect, reſembles the human body. That is made up of very many, great and ſmall, important and leſs important parts. Each whereof has its allotted poſition, its own powers, its particularly aſſigned operations and functions. No one can alter its poſition, or apply its powers to oppoſite purpoſes, without damage to the whole, or change its operations for the operations of another. No one need be concerned ſolely for the whole, but each only for his own; and yet

yet every one contributes certainly ſomething, by means of the cloſe connexion in which they all ſtand together, to the maintainance, the order, the beauty of the whole. The leaſt, the loweſt, of all theſe parts, is, in this reſpect, juſt as neceſſary and important as the greateſt and chiefeſt, though the former, by his nature and ſituation, do not and cannot perform ſo much and ſuch conſiderable ſervice as theſe. Juſt as it is with the human body, and all other natural or artificial machines, which are compoſed of various ſprings, wheels, weights, and the like, conjoined together; ſo is it likewiſe with human ſociety. It conſiſts of very many, ſtronger and weaker, more or leſs remarkable, members, which have all their particular deſtination, their particular capacities, diſpoſitions, adaptations, and employments; and the effects of the lawful and rational application of all theſe various capacities, diſpoſitions, adapt-

ations, and employments, produce, in their combination, what we term the public weal. Let each then only ſeek to fulfill his particular department, and he may reſt aſſured that he at the ſame time promotes the benefit of the reſt. Let the farmer cultivate the ground, and procure as much abundance from the earth, as the moſt unwearied induſtry can obtain; let the citizen, the workman, the artiſt, prepare and work up theſe productions to the moſt profitable uſe; let the merchant barter the ſuperfluity of them for riches of ſome other kind, which the country does not produce; let the father, the mother, imbue their children with the firſt notions and ſentiments of Religion, with a regard for duty and virtue, and the clergyman unfold theſe notions and elevate theſe ſentiments by his public and private inſtructions; let the ſcholar refute the baneful prejudices of the vulgar, meditate uſeful diſcoveries, and render them public in the moſt compre-

 henſible

henſible manner; let the unlearned profit by the light the ſcholar holds out to him, and put it to experience whether what he advances be uſeful or not; let the government execute the duties of their province with proper concern, and the governed facilitate theſe duties by the ready and faithful ſuccours they afford; let the poor apply their faculties to work, and the rich their ſuperfluity in beneficence; let the magiſtrate be impartial and reſolute in the adminiſtration of juſtice and equity; let the commander be conſtantly awake to the public ſecurity, order, tranquillity, and freedom; in fine, let the ſovereign take care that the weightieſt offices be ſupplied by the worthieſt perſons, let him protect and encourage all good inſtitutions with all his authority, let him, as much as poſſible, have an eye to all, and ſo cement all the parts of the whole together, as will moſt probably tend to its greateſt and moſt permanent happineſs: ſo will each man fulfill

his

his vocation. And whenever this happens, when each man, according to his ſtation and calling, is and does what he may and ought to be and to do, then does each man contribute his own to the general good, and the whole ſociety will infallibly be proſperous.

For rendering all this ſtill more perſpicuous, for ſhewing you ſtill more plainly how each perſon, by the faithful performance of the duties of his calling, labours at promoting the general welfare, and how even ſuch as have no particular vocation in the world, but are merely in ſervice to others, or otherwiſe connected with them, may do ſo likewiſe, I make a ſecond remark, which is this: As a man may promote the general good, either in the whole, or in certain particular parts, ſo likewiſe may a man do this either immediately or mediately. The former is done by means of ſuch actions, as in and of themſelves have a

conſiderable influence on the welfare of the whole ſociety; the latter is effected by our giving occaſion to theſe generally uſeful actions, ſupporting the perſons who carry them on, rendering them eaſy to them, and taking away from them certain affairs and difficulties that would have been a hindrance to them. The former can only be done by a few; the latter may and muſt be done by all. When the ſovereign, by his valour and that of his generals and commanders, protects the realm, keeps off the foe, and thus prevents all the miſery and devaſtations of war, he immediately promotes, and in a very high degree, the general good. But the ſoldiers and ſailors who execute his orders; the citizen and the countryman who enable the prince, by their taxes, to ſet on foot and to ſupport the army and navy; the manufacturer, the workman who prepares the cloaths and weapons for them; the preacher who inſpires them with courage by the doctrines

of

of Religion; the Chriſtian, who, like Moſes, lifts up his hands to God, and implores him in prayers for victory: do they not all promote the general good, as certainly and as really as the ſovereign, who makes uſe of their united powers and endeavours to the ſucceſsful execution of his beneficent plans?— The ſtateſman, the judge, the teacher of ſciences, the teacher of Religion, may alſo contribute much immediately to the proſperity of the whole ſociety. They may promote tranquillity, ſafety, induſtry and application, truth and virtue, which are alike neceſſary and uſeful to the well-being of all ſtates, of all conditions, and of all mankind. But how many helps do they require, what various ſervices do they ſtand in need of, if we would have them do this ſucceſsfully and without interruption? Here are diverſe urgent wants, wants of nature, wants of ſtation, wants of mode of living, which they themſelves cannot ſupply without robbing

themſelves

themſelves and the common weal of a part of their precious time, without diſtracting the attention that is devoted to the moſt important concerns, and exhauſting their powers. There are various kinds of difficulties, of diſagreeable occurrences, of little and great vexations, which have the ſame hoſtile effects upon them, and muſt deaden their zeal for the public welfare. But how many opportunities do theſe very circumſtances afford, how many means do they preſent to perſons of inferior capacities, or of lower ſtations, for promoting, if not immediately perhaps, yet mediately, the general benefit! You, who ſtand in domeſtic or amicable connections with ſuch important and worthy members of the ſtate and the church, or who have them for your maſters; let their example charm you to labour, like them, at the good of your fellow-creatures, and to become truly uſeful to the community; to this end, you need not quit your rank and calling; you need

need not employ yourſelves in the very ſame things to which they are obliged; you may ſhare with them in the fame of having acted for the common welfare on much eaſier terms, and in a ſurer way. Only provide with honeſt diligence for their neceſſities, for which they themſelves cannot provide without the manifeſt detriment of their charge. Only provide with exact fidelity for all that may ſupport and confirm their health, their quiet, and their content. Only keep, with circumſpection and prudence, every thing from them that may draw off their attention from weightier concernments, what may abate their vigour; what may damp the fire of their ſpirit, what may fill them with needleſs anxiety and cares. Only manage ſo, if you be ſtill more intimately connected with them by the tyes of marriage, or of conſanguinity and friendſhip, only ſo manage all things that they may enjoy unmoleſted, in the hours of recreation, the pleaſures of friendſhip,

ſhip, the pleaſures of domeſtic life, the mind's moſt wholeſome food, its beſt reſtoratives. Thus will you act no leſs nobly or with leſs public-ſpirit than they on whom you beſtow theſe offices; thus will you actually have part in their great undertakings, in their beneficent affairs, ſince they, without your help, could either not bring to effect at all, or not with ſo much ſucceſs.

In like manner may we in many other caſes, beſides being contributors to the public benefit by the faithful diſcharge of the duties of our calling, mediately promote it various ways, though we may not immediately be able to do ſo. Here is, for inſtance, a philoſopher, actuated by the pureſt love of truth, who is deſirous, with all his heart, to dedicate himſelf wholly to the inveſtigation of it, who poſſeſſes uncommon capacities for ſeeking after it, and who probably might oblige the whole human

man race by a variety of uſeful inventions. But his outward circumſtances allow him not to follow unimpeded this generous impulſe, and to devote all his time, all his powers, to the ſatisfying of it. Oft muſt he ſtop ſhort in the midſt of the way that would lead him to ſome important diſcovery, or even make a retreat, becauſe the painful ſentiment of his conſtantly increaſing penury conſtrains him to attend with ſolicitude to ſuch matters as have no connection with his main purſuit, but are rather in oppoſition to it. Would you then, you who, with far inferior capacities and powers of intellect, have an equal love for truth, and the ſame public-ſpirited diſpoſitions, would you act conſiſtently with theſe diſpoſitions; then ſupport this philoſopher, by your countenance and your goods; procure him an unſolicitous, a tranquil, and a comfortable life; repay him, by your eſteem and friendſhip, for his unwearied application; remove the hindrances that detain him on his

his progreſs, as far as you are able, out of his way: thus will you, when he has ſucceeded ſo as to kindle a luminous torch for his brethren, and to preſent them with ſome important truths, have a conſiderable ſhare in theſe diſcoveries, and in all the uſeful conſequences they ſhall produce in all ſucceeding ages.—Yonder is an ingenious, active man, who has found out new ſources of uſeful induſtry, who, by his peculiar penetration, by his ſingular dexterity, can bring a certain manufacture, a certain article of commerce into requeſt, and advance the benefit of the whole ſociety perhaps to the lateſt poſterity. But he is deficient in means to undertake and proſecute this buſineſs with proper energy. Aſſiſt him with your means, you who are heartily deſirous of being uſeful members of the common weal, the benefactors of your contemporaries; place him in a condition of applying his dexterity and his induſtry: ſo will you partake with him, not indeed

in the honour of the diſcovery, but in the honour of its proſecution; and the ſociety will owe you its thanks, in certain reſpects, as much as to him, becauſe, without your aſſiſtance, he would never have been able to do it that ſervice he has now actually done.

The third remark is this: We may promote the public benefit, while we are providing for our own; at times, however, we may and ought to do it by voluntarily letting ſlip ſome certain advantage, and being ſolely concerned for the ſupport, and the greater advantage, of the reſt of the members of the community. The former holds good on moſt occaſions; the latter is but ſeldom and in particular emergencies demanded of us, though we ought always to be prepared for them. When any one, as I have ſhewn above, exerts his earneſt endeavours to the diſcharge of the duties of his ſtation and calling, and to make a good

uſe of his capacities and powers, he thereby undoubtedly promotes his own advantage; he reaps honour, pleaſure, and profit, from his induſtry and ſkill. But likewiſe thereby he furthers the advantage of the whole ſociety, which yields him this honour, this pleaſure, this profit, as a recompence for his uſeful ſervice, and the proſperity whereof conſiſts in the proſperity of each individual member of it taken together. This connexion, however, between our particular profit and the general profit of the whole, does not always obtain. There are cauſes where they are at variance, and where, therefore, we muſt let the former ſlip, that we may uphold the latter; and as often as we do this, it may be truly ſaid of us, in the ſtricteſt acceptation of the terms, that we act in a public-ſpirited and noble manner. When I therefore, for example, renounce my comforts and my repoſe, for affording certain ſervices and ci-

vilities to the community, to which, by my particular vocation, I am not obliged; when I relinquish a lucrative poſt that is offered me, to another who is able to fill it far more worthily than I; when I refrain from producing an invention, which would procure very great advantage to me and mine, but which would caſt a far greater number of my fellow-citizens into poverty and miſery; if I publiſh a ſecret in medicine, or any other important diſcovery, which would fill my purſe if I diſcloſed it to none; if I rather chuſe to undergo ſome detriment in my health, or even put my life in jeopardy, than neglect ſomething that may be of great utility, or do ſomething that may be of general detriment: I ſacrifice, in all theſe caſes, my own particular profit to the general good; and for this muſt we conſtantly be prepared, if we would faithfully follow the precept of the Apoſtle.

To

To this we were previouſly bound by reaſon, which tells us, that we do not exiſt for ourſelves alone, but for others alſo; that we muſt prefer a greater and more durable good, to one far inferior, and of ſhorter duration; that it is but equitable for us to forego the advantages for the poſſeſſion and enjoyment whereof we ſtand indebted to ſociety, whenever its benefit requires ſuch dereliction; and that, in ſhort, the conſciouſneſs of having acted right and well, far tranſcends all the damage we may thus ſuſtain. To this we are much more forcibly bound by the Chriſtian doctrine. Its confeſſors are not to be diſtinguiſhed from other men ſo much by ceremonies and opinions, as by their diſintereſted, affectionate, beneficent, and magnanimous turn of mind. In this view it gives us the precept: "Look not every man on his own things; but every man alſo on the things of others." In this view it propoſes to us the example of our Redeemer, who,

for our ſakes, embraced poverty and ignominy, perſecution and death, to be the rule of our imitation in all events; and requires, as the Apoſtle adds directly afterwards, that the ſame "mind ſhould be in us, which was alſo in Chriſt Jeſus." In this view, finally, it promiſes to them who deny themſelves, who follow Chriſt, and, like him, hazard much for their brethren, the moſt glorious recompenſe in the future world. What arguments for a diſintereſted and generous conduct!

Now, combine all theſe remarks together; and it will not be difficult for you to acquire plain and juſt conceptions, how every man, without diſtinction of calling and condition, may and ought to labour at the advancement of the general good, now in one way, and then in another. Let us now, to conclude, deduce ſome practical reſults, or rules of behaviour, in few words, from theſe remarks.

The

The firſt is this: Let every one ſtrive to fill well the poſt he occupies in human ſociety, and do that which he may and ought to do, according to his ſtation and calling, as completely as he can, as his capacities and powers allow. This is the eaſieſt and ſureſt means of becoming uſeful to others. Whence does it ariſe, that the general advantage is not more promoted? Not, becauſe you, or I, or other perſons, who account themſelves true patriots, and who probably are ſo too, do not fill the principal ſtations, and have not more command and authority over their brethren; but, becauſe only few worthily ſupport the ſtation they actually hold, and do as much good as by means of it they may and ſhould. The generality are not contented with their ſtation: they wiſh to exchange it with another; they meddle in things that do not belong to them; whereby they neglect what are properly their own, or perform them not with ſo much ardour, nor ſo ſe-

dulouſly, nor in ſuch a uſeful manner, as they ſhould be done. Avoid theſe faults, if you are deſirous of deſervedly bearing the name of public-ſpirited men and citizens. Let every man, as the Scripture ſpeaks, abide in the ſame calling, wherein he is called. "As every man hath received the gift, even ſo miniſter the ſame one to another, as good ſtewards of the manifold grace of God." Subjects, citizens, who have no ſhare in the government of the country, nor can have, waſte not your time and your powers in arrogantly inveſtigating, and ſeverely judging, the conduct of thoſe who are elevated above you. Strive rather to frame your own behaviour as irreproachably and honourably as you always can. Erect not yourſelves into lawgivers, but obſerve the ſalutary laws that are already given. Fathers and mothers, be not ſo much troubled about what is paſſing in the great world, or among your neighbours and acquaintance, as about

what is going forward in your own houſes, in your own families. "Train up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; make them wiſe and virtuous." This is the moſt important contribution you can pay to the good of the whole ſociety. Let no man diſtract himſelf in too many affairs, and in ſuch as are too remote from his calling; but let every one keep his vocation ever in view, and ſeek to diſcharge the duties of it with all poſſible exactitude.

The ſecond conſequence, or rule of conduct, which we deduce from our remarks, is this: Let no man deſpiſe another on account of the place he occupies in human ſociety. It is not the place which makes us reſpectable or contemptible, but the manner in which we fill it. The day-labourer contributes of what he has to the general good, as well as the ſtateſman; and he that is moſt faithful to his duty,

merits

merits undoubtedly the greateſt eſteem, whether, moreover, he be rich or poor, high or low. The Apoſtle Paul beautifully repreſents this matter to us in that apt ſimilitude he borrows from the human body. "If the whole body," ſays he, "were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the ſmelling. And if all the members were ſingly members, where were the body? But now hath God ſet the members, every one of them in the body, as it hath pleaſed him. And now are they many members, yet but one body. The eye cannot ſay unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more thoſe members of the body which ſeem to be more feeble, are neceſſary. God hath tempered the body together, that there ſhould be no ſchiſm in the body; but that the members ſhould have the ſame care one for another." Now you are, as men and as Chriſtians, this

this body, and one is this, and the other another member of it.

The third and laſt conſequence, or rule of conduct, we deduce from our remarks, is this: Let every one ſeek to ennoble the affairs of his calling, and his manner of life, by the pure and beneficent views he has therein. Let him open his heart to the univerſal and brotherly love which Nature and Chriſtianity ſo ſtrongly recommend, and obediently follow their humane ſuggeſtions. Let him allow the fear of God, the deſire to pleaſe him, and to do his will, to be the governing principle of his whole deportment. Let him ſtrive after the unfading renown of being declared on the day of judgment, a good and faithful ſervant of God. This, this will confer a certain value on all your affairs and tranſactions, however mean they, in and for themſelves, may be, not only in your own eyes, but in the eyes of ſuperior beings, if they

they ſtand in any relation with our earth, and are the witneſſes of our behaviour; in the eyes of God Moſt High himſelf, on whoſe approbation and grace our all depends. For this is and remains an eternal truth: "Him that has been faithful over a few things, will the Lord make ruler over many things."

OF

OF

LOVE

TOWARDS

GOD.

Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind. This is the firſt and great commandment. Matthew xxii. 37, 38.

OF LOVE TOWARDS GOD.

THE divine command we have juſt now read, though a melancholy intimation of the great corruption that prevails among mankind, is yet a manifeſt token of the excellency of the meaſures God has taken for our improvement and recovery. Were not mankind in an eminent degree corrupt; had they not, by ſin, forſaken God; were not their underſtandings darkened, and their hearts full of inordinate and extravagant deſires; would it have been neceſſary to command them to love God, their Creator and Lord, their Father and Benefactor? Would it have been needful

ful to incite them, by all kinds of remonſtrances and motives, to the obſervance of ſo natural and ſo bleſſed a duty? Would they not of themſelves have fulfilled it with all poſſible care? Would they not have found their greateſt joy, their pureſt pleaſures, in contemplating the perfection of the Moſt High, in the adoration of his infinite grandeur and majeſty, in their intercourſe with him, in his ſervice, and in obedience to his commands? Certainly, their hearts, inflamed with love towards him, would have ſought their happineſs in communicating with him alone; to pleaſe him, and, in return, to be aſſured of his good-pleaſure, would have been their chief, their ſole concern. It is ſin alone, that peſtilential ſource of every kind of contradiction and diſorder, that keeps us from loving with all our heart, and with all our ſoul, the kindeſt Sovereign, the moſt liberal Benefactor, the moſt affectionate Father.

But

But, while the ſacred precept before us demonſtrates the greatneſs of our moral corruption, and reminds us of the deplorable condition into which ſin has plunged us; it likewiſe moſt clearly evinces to us the excellency of the meaſures God has adopted for our improvement and ſanctification. What is more calculated to ſhew us Religion in a venerable light, and to inſpire us with a reverence for it, than when we hear that its principal requiſite conſiſts in love? What is more adapted to move us, if we have any reflexion and ſentiment, than when we underſtand, that God, this glorious being, who has no need of us, whom we have ſo much offended, whom we have ſo many cauſes to fear, that this God requires of us that we ſhould love him? And if this love has once taken poſſeſſion of our ſoul, what is more adapted than this to animate us to perſeverance in goodneſs, to diligence in ſanctification, to a chearful and vigorous virtue? How

eaſy muſt the compliance with all other duties, even the moſt difficult, be, if we heartily fulfill this greateſt of all! What ſhould then lie nearer our heart, than to awake, to cheriſh, and to confirm the love of God in our ſouls? What ſhould more ſhame and afflict us, than the knowledge that this natural and bleſſed duty is ſtill a ſtranger to us, or that we do not diſcharge it with the eaſe and pleaſure that our obligation and our own advantage require? Oh! how many charming hours, how many raviſhing ſenſations do we loſe, how little courage and fortitude for combating iniquity, how little comfort and hope in afflictions and death have we to expect, if we do not love God, or if we do not ſo love him as we ought! May it then pleaſe the Lord to bleſs the conſiderations I ſhall lay before you on this important ſubject, and to kindle in your hearts that ardour of love towards him, which is the abundant ſource of the pureſt virtue and the moſt exalted

joy;

joy; or to grant it freſh nouriſhment and force! In purſuance of this deſign, I ſhall do three things.

Firſt, I will point out to you the ſentiments and actions wherein the love of God is chiefly exhibited, and in which it principally conſiſts.

Secondly, I will explain how our love to God ſhould be framed, or what qualities it ſhould poſſeſs, if it be true.

Laſtly, I will enforce the reaſons that bind us to the love of God.

The firſt part will employ your devotion now. The two others, as the matter is of ſuch vaſt importance, and contains ſo many uſeful doctrines, muſt be deferred till we aſſemble here again.

To love God implies, in general, to account him, from intimate conviction, the ſovereign good, the ſource of all our happineſs; to delight more in him than in all things elſe; to prize his favour, and to deſire his converſe, above all others; and to ſtrive to pleaſe him with all our powers. The love we owe to God is, in the main, not diſcernible from the love we bear our friends and relations. Both that and this, if we would have them ſincere and laſting, muſt be grounded on lively ideas of the reſpectable and amiable qualities we diſcover in the objects of our love. Both are diſplayed by the very ſame emotions and actions, of pleaſure, of joy, of deſire, of complacency, and obedience. Only we muſt carefully ſee to it, that we do not take the ſenſual and violent ſenſations that ariſe when the objects of our love are ſenſible and viſible, for a neceſſary or eſſential part of that love which ſettles on God, the Moſt Perfect Spirit. Our love to God muſt,

muſt, as far as the weakneſs of our preſent conſtitution will allow, be conformable to his pure and exalted nature; in other words, it muſt be rational; and hence it conſiſts, not ſo much in the vivacity and vehemence of our ſenſations, as in the continuance of them and their influence on our conduct. This once premiſed, it will not be difficult for us to ſtate more accurately whereby the love of God principally exhibits and diſplays itſelf. We need only conſult our heart, for carrying on the compariſon as we have ſettled it.

I. Frequent meditation on God is the firſt article by which the devout man evinces his love to the Supreme Exiſtence, and by which he ſhews it to be operative in him. How often, how heartily do we think on a friend whom we tenderly love! How deeply is his image engraved on our ſoul! On how many occaſions do we imagine him preſent to our mind! How

attentively do we fix our eyes upon the intellectual image! The ſlighteſt reſemblance reminds us of his features, of his ſpeech, of his actions, of his eminent endowments. Theſe thoughts not ſeldom intervene in the midſt of our weightieſt affairs, and we find a pleaſure in cheriſhing and indulging them. Juſt ſo it is with him who loves his God. He often thinks, he thinks with all delight, with all his heart, on that moſt amiable Being. Theſe thoughts are ſo natural to him, that they preſent themſelves to his mind on all occaſions; that they attend him every where; that they mix themſelves with all his affairs, his pleaſures, his joys, and his ſorrows. They are ſo agreeable to him, that he conſiders them as the life of his ſoul; that he nouriſhes them with all care, and dwells on them ſo long as his other duties will allow. Whichever way he turns his eyes, he will find on all ſides ſhining traces of the wiſdom, the omnipotence, the goodneſs,

neſs, of his Creator; every creature leads him to reflect on the glory and perfection of its author. They all exclaim to him in an audible voice: "Great is our Lord, "and great is his power; there is no end "of his greatneſs; he is loving unto every "man, and is mercy is over all his works!" Happen what will in the world, the pious man recognizes in every event, whether great or ſmall, the hand of the Sovereign Ruler of heaven and earth, and adores his will, without which nothing is, or ever can be. Let his own circumſtances take what turn they may, they conduct him ſtraight to God: he conſiders them all in their dependance on him. Do his enterpriſes ſucceed; does he enjoy peace, and pleaſure, and comfort: it is God, whom he reveres as the fountain of all theſe benefits, to whom he is indebted for all, to whoſe bleſſing he aſcribes the whole of his welfare. Do his endeavours and plans prove abortive; does he meet with adverſities and ſorrows: it is

God, in whom he repoſes; to whom he reſigns his fate; from whom he expects conſolation and help. Thus does he walk, as the Scripture ſpeaks, in the preſence of God; and every thing he ſees and hears, every thing that happens to himſelf and to others, gives him, as a friend and lover of God, occa on and incentive to think on that Firſt and Beſt of Beings, and to lift up his heart to him in ſilent devotion.

II. The delight with which the pious man attends on public as well as private worſhip, is the ſecond article whereby his love to God appears and ſhews itſelf active. How heartily do we diſcourſe with our friends! How do we long for their converſe, when we are deprived of it for a length of time! What a ſenſible pleaſure it gives us when we can open all our heart in their preſence, without reſerve; when we can lay before them our moſt ſecret thoughts and deſigns for diſcuſſion; when we

we can ſhare with them our joys and our ſorrows! And ſhall the man who loves God have leſs pleaſure in converſe with him? But how can we otherwiſe converſe with this exalted Being, than by making him the object of our thoughts and meditations; but by hearing and reading his word; but by praying to him, and by bringing him, as well in the aſſembly of the ſaints, as in the retirement of the cloſet, the offering of praiſe and gratitude ſo juſtly his due? occupations which the lover of God not only finds not difficult, but grateful and deſireable, to his heart. He prefers theſe exerciſes of piety to all ſenſual indulgences, and only then is truly happy, when he draws nigh to God, and has ſweet communion with him. How refreſhing is it to him, when, retired from the buſtle of temporal affairs and diſtractions, he contemplates the infinite attributes, the wiſe and benignant ways and works of the Moſt High; when he conſiders the comfortable rela-

relation wherein he ſtands to his Creator and Father, to his Benefactor and Redeemer; when he ruminates on what proofs of his favour and love he has already received, and what glorious demonſtrations of it he has yet in futurity to expect; when, full of admiration and gratitude, he proſtrates himſelf in adoration before him who liveth for ever and ever! What a ſacred tranſport fills his ſoul, when, in filial ſimplicity, he bows before the throne of grace, pours forth all his heart to the Majeſty of Heaven, caſts all his cares upon him, relies upon his favour, and obtains, from the divine ſufficiency, whatever ſtrength he needs for overcoming evil, whatever power for the diſcharge of his duties, whatever fortitude for enduring ſorrow! How agreable it is to him when he goes to the aſſembly of the faithful in the houſe of God, when he unites himſelf with them, when he praiſes the God of Heaven with them, as it were with one mouth,

mouth, and may regard himſelf already as a bleſſed aſſociate of that company of the juſt made perfect, who inceſſantly praiſe the Moſt High with united and unabated fervour. "He comes," as the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks, "before his preſence with thankſgiving, and ſhews himſelf glad in him with pſalms." One day, one hour, that he paſſes in his courts, is of more value to him than a thouſand elſewhere. In fine, what a pleaſure is it to him to hear the word of the Lord, or to read it for himſelf with a placid ſpirit! Here he finds more light, more wiſdom, more force, more comfort, than in all, even the moſt excellent human writings. Here he liſtens to the voice of his Sovereign Ruler and Lord, his moſt affectionate Father and Friend, and ſtudies his thoughts, his deſigns, and his will. Conſequently "the laws and ſtatutes of the Moſt High muſt be dearer to him than thouſands of gold and ſilver, ſweeter alſo than honey and the honey-comb."

III. An

II. An enlightened and active zeal for the honour and glory of God, is the third article by which the love towards God is manifeſted and effectively displayed. Are we indifferent, when our friend is ſlandered, when his reputation is attacked, when he is charged with crimes he never committed, when his beſt actions are debaſed, and repreſented as vices in diſguiſe; or do we hear it without a ſenſible pleaſure, when men do juſtice to his integrity, acknowledge his qualifications and merits, ſhew him a becoming reſpect, and beſtow encomiums on his character; how much intereſt do we take, in both caſes, in whatever concerns him! How careful are we to exculpate and to juſtify him, when he is falſely accuſed by envy or malice! and how great is our ſatisfaction, when he is honoured and eſteemed by others! But ſhall not the man who ſincerely loves God be ſo diſpoſed towards the object of his affection? Shall he remain indifferent and cold, when the

ways

ways and works of the Lord are cenſured with petulance and pride, when his holy name is inſulted and blaſphemed, when his ordinances are derided and ſcorned? Shall he not be deeply concerned, when he ſees men walking their own ways, following their corrupt inclinations, wandering farther and farther from God, and obſtinately refuſing him the obedience ſo juſtly his due! Shall it not, on the other hand, fill him with intenſe delight, when he finds out ſome worthy worſhiper of God; when he is a witneſs to his elevated ſentiments, his juſt and beneficent actions; when he is aſſured that he buſies himſelf in extending the dominion of truth, of virtue, and the fear of God among mortals! Yes, nothing troubles the pious more than to ſee men ignorant and vicious, the enemies and deſpiſers of God; and he can ſay with the Pſalmiſt: "Mine eyes guſh out with water, becauſe men keep not thy law." Nothing makes him more ſad than the conſideration,

ſideration, that ſtill ſo many nations live in darkneſs, idlatory, and ſuperſtition, and know neither God nor Jeſus Chriſt whom he has ſent. Nothing cauſes him, on the other hand, more ſenſible joy, than when he hears that ſuch a ſinner is reformed, that ſuch a ſcorner has ſtood corrected, that true Religion extends its conqueſts over the globe. And how earneſtly does he deſire that the kingdom of God may come, that all the world may fear the Lord, that all the nations may bow down before him, and that his name may be announced and honoured to the uttermoſt ends of the earth! How careful is he, at the ſame time, that all his words and works, by affectionate admonitions, by ſerious reprehenſions, by encouraging example, may contribute, as much as poſſible, to promote this deſign; and how pleaſed is he, when, under the divine bleſſing, theſe his endeavours are not wholly in vain!

IV. A conſtant and earneſt endeavour to pleaſe God by a willing and unlimited obedience to his commands, is the fourth article, by which the love towards God is diſplayed, and evinced to be effective. This, in reality, compoſes the moſt eſſential part of it. This is the principal and moſt proper idea of this great requiſite we can draw from the ſacred writings. It is likewiſe founded in the nature of ſincere love, and cannot be ſeparated from it. Do we not ſedulouſly abſtain from every thing that may give umbrage to a friend whom we tenderly love? Do we not take great pains to acquire his approbation, to give him a good opinion of us, or conſtantly to add to the confirmation of it? Do we account it too much expence to avoid doing any thing we know him to be utterly averſe to? Does it ſeem hard to do any thing that will particularly pleaſe him? Or, do we venture to boaſt of a tender affection towards him when we purſue a different conduct?

How

How think you then can we love God, if we are not ſo diſpoſed towards him? Are we not guilty of ſelf-contradiction, if we declare ourſelves for his friends, and yet deſignedly tranſgreſs his commands, and are the ſervants of vice and ſin? Are we ignorant, that the holy God regards iniquity with the utmoſt abhorrence, and is the enemy of the evil-doer? Do we not know, that he loves order and truth above all things, that he has the greateſt delight in virtue, and that the practice of it is the only means to acquire his favour? Does he not thus addreſs us himſelf by his ſervants: "O ye that love the Lord, ſee that ye hate the thing that is evil." "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." "If we ſay that we have fellowſhip with him, and walk in darkneſs, we lie, and do not the truth." No! He that loves God from his heart, he readily hearkens to his will, and does his will with joy. Since he holds his favour to be

be better than life, ſince he deſires nothing more ardently than to render himſelf agreeable to the Sovereign Being, and ſince he knows that it is impoſſible to pleaſe him without bearing his image, and in his fear perfecting holineſs, he therefore makes all this his chief concern. In his determinations and actions he conſults neither the luſts of his fleſh, nor his temporal advantage, nor the bad principles and cuſtoms of the world, but ſolely the good and perfect will of his God. This he makes the rule of his whole behaviour. This he examines daily, to try whether he may not have ſinned againſt it from ignorance. What is at variance with it, that he hates, that he ſhuns and avoids with deteſtation and terror. What harmonizes with it, that he ſeeks, that he loves and does, coſt what it will of labour, pains, and ſelf-denial. In ſhort, he is more afraid of offending his heavenly Father, and loſing his clemency, than of bringing on himſelf the hatred and ani-

moſity of the mightieſt of the earth; and it is of infinitely more conſequence to him to pleaſe the Moſt High, than to acquire the eſteem and applauſe of all the world.

V. The love of God muſt, fifthly, manifeſt itſelf by a ſincere and effective love of our neighbour. True love is always buſy; it is active, and is glad when it can contribute any thing to the benefit of him to whom it is devoted. We make it a pleaſure in any way to promote the happineſs of our friend. If we cannot do him any good himſelf, becauſe he is more powerful than we, and ſtands in no need of our help; yet are we ready to do it to ſuch as belong to him, as are connected with him, as are dear and precious in his ſight. His recommendation of any one to us will not be in vain; and a diſtant hint from him is already ſufficient to move us to the moſt zealous furtherance of his intentions. Apply this to the pious lover of God,

God, and you will diſcern a new feature of his character, a new effect of his love. God is infinitely exalted above all neceſſities. He is in himſelf unalterably and ſupremely happy. We cannot augment his perfection, nor give him any thing he has not firſt given us. But he has rational creatures, who bear his likeneſs; he has children; he has friends and ſubjects here on earth, whom we may actually ſerve, to whom we may be uſeful in various ways, whoſe temporal and eternal proſperity we may promote. Theſe he recommends to our love, to our care, to our help. To theſe we are to do what we cannot do to him who is all-ſufficient. In his extreme condeſcenſion, he will ſo regard the benefits we confer on them, as if we had beſtowed them on him. Shall ſuch recommendations make no impreſſion on us? Shall we not rejoice when we have the means and the opportunity to act in correſpondence with them? Or can we neg-

lect them without forfeiting all pretenſions to the love of God, and declaring ourſelves in fact as his enemies? Let us ſee how this matter ſtands. "If a man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother whom he hath ſeen, how can he love God whom he hath not ſeen? And this commandment have we from him, that he, who loveth God, love his brother alſo." "But whoſo hath this world's goods, and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

VI. Laſtly, the love of God diſplays itſelf in ſincere aſpirations after heaven, where we ſhall be more intimately united with him, and partake of his good-pleaſure in a ſuperior degree. What is more natural to us than to lament our diſtance from the friend of our heart, and to deſire his continual preſence? What more ſenſibly affects us than when our fortunes di-

vide

vide us aſunder, or when our avocations and mode of life will not allow us to be ſo often together as we earneſtly wiſh? The man, who loves God above all things, finds himſelf in ſimilar circumſtances here on earth. Knowing, as he does, that God is not far from every one of us; that admiſſion to the throne of grace ſtands ever open to him; that, even in this life, he has communion with the Father, and with his ſon Jeſus Chriſt; he walks by faith, and not by ſight. His knowledge of God is ſtill very obſcure; his virtue is extremely defective and imperfect; his piety and joy are ſtill liable to many dangers and revolutions. The bands that hold him to the earth hinder him very often from approaching the Deity, and from employing himſelf in ſpiritual and heavenly affairs. How painfully muſt theſe ties at times afflict him! What an ardent deſire muſt theſe conſiderations kindle in him, to be diſſolved from them, and to be removed into

a more perfect ſtate! Yes, when the pious man fixes his attention on the infinite glory and amiableneſs of God; when he compares it with the inferior degree of his love; when he reflects how many, for the moſt part inſurmountable, hindrances, the buſineſſes, the cares, the temptations of this world, and the infirmities of the body, lie in his way, to prevent him from maintaining a cloſer intercourſe with this bleſſed Being; he elevates himſelf in ſpirit above all that is earthly; all his deſires are directed to heaven, the abode of the pureſt and moſt perfect love. He wiſhes ſoon to be admitted to his Father's houſe; and, full of ſacred fervour, he exclaims, "My ſoul is athirſt for God, yea, even for the living God: when ſhall I come to appear before the preſence of God!" When will the day arrive, when I ſhall more fully know that Firſt, that Beſt, that Greateſt of all Beings, more juſtly conceive of his exalted attributes, and perceive the beauty, the

the perfection, the wiſdom, and goodneſs, of his ways and works in a clearer light? When ſhall I be ſo happy as completely to be freed from ſin, which ſo often debars me from God, and hides from me his gracious face, and to ſerve him without diſtraction, without wearineſs, without infirmity? When will it be granted me, to enjoy undiſturbed the bleſſed effects of his favour and affection, and to love him in return purely and perfectly, without diminution or change!

Theſe are the principal diſpoſitions and actions by which the love of God is ſeen, and in which it chiefly conſiſts. They are all connected moſt intimately together, and no one can ſubſiſt without the reſt. They are all of them grounded in the nature of things, and muſt be found, at leaſt in their elements and eſſence, in every pious breaſt. Do we find them then with us? Are we animated by theſe divine diſpoſitions and ſentiments? Are they known to

us from experience? And does our heart bear us the conſoling teſtimony, that we think and act like the lover of God, whoſe character we have now conſidered? Is it become quite natural to us, on all occaſions, to turn our thoughts to God, and to obſerve his hand and will in all things? Is it our real joy to ſerve him in public and in private? to adore him, to converſe with him, and to inform ourſelves of the contents of his holy word? Does it grieve us, when the honour of God and of Religion is affronted and obſcured? Do we rejoice, when the name of the Moſt High is revered, and his kingdom extended among mankind? and do we contribute as much as we can thereto? Is nothing more near to our heart than the deſire of pleaſing God? and do we evince it by the conſcientious care with which we ſtrive to fulfill his commands? Do we love our neighbour on God's account, and from our love to him? and is it our pleaſure to benefit others, and

even

even in this to reſemble our heavenly Father, as his obedient children? Do we, in the laſt place, frequently direct our eyes to the future world? and do we long, not from diſguſt, not from diſcontent, but from an ardent deſire of becoming more holy and more perfect, after the bleſſed abodes of the juſt? When I reflect how common it is to be cold towards God and divine concerns, how indifferent moſt men are to whatever relates to Religion and Piety, how ſeldom they employ themſelves in ſuch reflexions, how little pleaſure they find in ſuch affairs, and how often they entirely loſe ſight of God, his commandments, his benefactions, and his will; when I conſider what numbers either neglect altogether both public and private worſhip, or perform them, not with delight, but merely from cuſtom and conſtraint, and how many are, in a manner, aſhamed of devotional exerciſes, which however compoſe ſo important and ſo eſſential a part of worſhip;

when I turn over in mind how many hearts are totally poſſeſſed by that ſervile love of the world and variety, which are in direct oppoſition to the love of God, and are ſo faſcinated by them, that all their imaginations and endeavours, all their deſires and aims, are directed merely to earthly and tranſitory goods and diſtinctions, merely to ſenſual pleaſures and amuſements; when I think how much more men dread affronting the world than God, and how much greater pains they take to pleaſe mankind than him: when I reflect on all this, I feel my whole ſoul affected; for I ſee that God, who merits ſo much our tendereſt love, is only loved of the ſmaller number, and of theſe few not ſo ardently and zealouſly as it is reaſonable he ſhould; I ſee that ſtill many of us are enemies and deſpiſers of God, who is ſo clement, ſo merciful, ſo bountiful, towards us, and without whom we cannot be happy. O, let theſe conſiderations have their weight; let

them

them awaken you to reflexion, to ſelf-examination, to humble yourſelves before God, to a deep remorſe for your treſpaſſes, to an immediate and ſerious converſion. Deplore your ſad dereliction of God, the Father of Light and Life. Form lively repreſentations of the deplorable conſequences of it, and impreſs it deeply on your mind, that, without God and communion with him, nothing but miſery and ruin is to be expected. No longer ſhut your hearts againſt him. They are his, and he demands them of you as his own. Conſecrate to him your inclinations and deſires: he alone is completely worthy of them; he alone can ſatisfy and anſwer them. Let us all ſeek our glory and our happineſs in the love of God. When once this ſacred flame is kindled in our ſouls, let us cheriſh it with all our care. Never may it be quenched or abated by the love of the world and ſin! May it ever receive new force and vigour from our prayers, our devotions,

devotions, our zeal in piety and virtue! Happy for us if we follow theſe maxims! God will then fulfill in us that promiſe which compriſes in it all that is precious and deſirable: "I love them that love me; and they that ſeek me diligently ſhall find me." Amen.

OF

OF

LOVE

TOWARDS

GOD;

CONTINUED.

Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind. This is the firſt and great commandment. Matthew xxii. 37, 38.

OF LOVE TOWARDS GOD; CONTINUED.

LAST week we ſhewed you whe rei conſiſts principally that love towards God, ſo earneſtly enjoined us by the Saviour of the world, and by what pious diſpoſitions and actions it chiefly appears and ſhews itſelf effective. We have ſeen that the lover of God frequently and readily, and on all occaſions, thinks of him; that he obſerves all the duties of public as well as private devotion with joy and gladneſs; that he is animated by an enlightened and active zeal for the honour and glory of God,

for the extenſion of true Religion and Virtue; that he lays nothing more to heart than to render himſelf agreeable to the Sovereign Being by a ſtrict obedience towards all his commands; that he ſeeks his pleaſure in beneficence, and heartily contributes all he can to the happineſs of his brethren, the creatures, the children, and ſubjects of God, becauſe God has expreſſly recommended them to his care and aſſiſtance; and that, laſtly, he longs after heaven, after the ſtate of perfection, where he ſhall be more cloſely united with God, where he ſhall know him better, ſerve him with more purity and zeal, and enjoy the bleſſed effects of his good pleaſure in a higher degree: by theſe characteriſtics we exhorted you to examine your hearts and your conduct. And how much we wiſh that this examination might produce in you the abundant fruit of repentance and amendment! We are now to diſcuſs, with the divine aſſiſtance and bleſſing, ſomething

thing more fully the two remaining diviſions of our deſign. The former relates to the properties our love towards God muſt have for being true; the other comprehends the reaſons which oblige us to this duty. What a happineſs will it be for you and for me, if it be granted me to ſhew you theſe reaſons in their real nature and in their whole force! and if you be ſenſible to the power of them, and thence be moved to love God above all things!

Our Saviour himſelf acquaints us of the properties our love to God muſt have for being true, when he ſays, "Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy ſoul, with all thy mind, and," as Mark ſubjoins, "with all thy ſtrength." Theſe reduplicated expreſſions, which apparently denote the ſelf-ſame thing, ſerve to ſhew, in general, the ſincerity no leſs than the force and degree of love we owe to God. They give us to underſtand, undiſſembled,

an ardent, an effective, and a conſtant love, which captivates, as it were, the whole human ſoul, which ſets all its capacities and powers in motion, and becomes a ruling principle. We muſt, however, take great care not to puſh the meaning of theſe terms too far, leſt we confirm the unbeliever and the ſinner in the miſchievous miſtake, that God, in his laws, requires impoſſibilities of mankind; that he demands ſomething in oppoſition to the nature of man, when he exacts of him that he ſhould think on nothing elſe than God; that he ſhould conſtantly turn all his attention towards the Supreme Exiſtence; that he ſhould be inceſſantly employed in contemplating his perfection and glory, and to this end neglect all other buſineſſes and affairs. Would it not be a thing impoſſible, and contradictory to the nature of man, to make it his duty to wiſh and ſtrive for nothing at all but God, to love nothing at all beſide him, and to be indifferent and inſenſible towards every other

other thing, how fair, how good, how uſeful ſoever it might be? Certainly this is not what our wiſe and benign Legiſlator demands of us, by ordering us to love him "with all our heart, with all our ſoul, and with all our ſtrength." This would be far above our ability, and manifeſtly at variance with the deſigns of our Maker. He has himſelf even conſtituted our nature as it actually is. But what is more natural to us, than that we love ourſelves? that we prize and deſire, in a certain degree, whatever may promote our welfare? that we find a reliſh for the enjoyment of the conveniences and advantages of life? and that we ſhould contemplate the beauty and excellence of the divine works with pleaſure, and rejoice therein? Nay, has not the Lord expreſsly commanded us to love our neighbour? and what can be more conſonant to the will of the God of Holineſs, than for us to make order, truth, virtue, and moral good, let us find them where we will,

the objects of our eſteem and love? But I ſtay too long in confuting an error which is ſo contrary to the principles both of reaſon and Revelation, and is in direct oppoſition to all our feelings. We have already ſaid, that the phraſe, "to love God with all our heart, with all our ſoul, and with all our ſtrength," denotes an unfeigned, a ſtrong, a predominant, and conſtant love. And theſe are the main properties our love to God muſt have, if it be of the proper kind.

It muſt, firſt, be ſincere. It muſt be founded on a juſt knowledge and a lively ſentiment of the venerable and amiable attributes of God. The words and actions, by which we expreſs and diſplay it, muſt be in exact harmony with the inclinations and diſpoſitions of our heart. Without this harmony, whatever we ſay and do to demonſtrate our love to God is hypocriſy, and muſt neceſſarily diſpleaſe the Omni-

Omniſcient, who ſees in ſecret. Nay, without this harmony of heart and outward deportment, no real love is poſſible at all. A love that does not move and affect the heart, which leaves it inſenſible and cold, which conſiſts merely in reverential grimace, in courteous words, in adulatory commendations, in a few unmeaning compliments, is manifeſt contradiction and abſurdity. Leaſt of all does it deſerve the name of love, when it has the Sovereign Being for its object. God is a ſpirit; and they that adore him, that worſhip him, that ſerve him, that love him, muſt do ſo in ſpirit and in truth.

We muſt, ſecondly, love God above, or more than, all things elſe, if we would conform to the precept of the Saviour of the world. Nothing muſt be more eſtimable, more dear, more deſirable in our eyes, than the grace, the favour, and the good-pleaſure, of the Moſt High. Nothing muſt be

of greater moment to us than the obtaining or the ſecuring of it. This muſt be the ultimate aim of all our wiſhes, of all our endeavours and actions. The greateſt earthly advantages, the moſt raviſhing ſenſual pleaſures, muſt appear to us diſadvantageous and contemptible; we muſt renounce and reject them without heſitation, when they obſtruct us in this exalted deſign. No difficulties, no loſſes, no obſtacles, muſt terrify us from purſuing our courſe after this pearl of great price, or fatigue us in it. The will of God muſt make more impreſſion on us than all the threats and promiſes of the world; and we muſt hearken to him, in all caſes, even the moſt perilous circumſtances, rather than to men, however mighty and terrific they may be. When we are to chuſe between God and the world, between the good pleaſures of the Eternal, and the approbation of mortals, we are not to ſtop one moment in conſidering which to prefer. No ſacrifice muſt

be

be too expenſive, or too precious, for us to bring with willing hearts to God and to Religion, when they require it of us. Nay, we muſt be ready to relinquiſh and ſurrender even that which is moſt dear and delightful to us here on earth, if we may not preſerve it without incurring the diſpleaſure of the Sovereign Being, or expoſing us to the danger of loſing his favour. This is what our Saviour aſks of us, when he ſays; "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth ſon or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me: whoſoever he be of you that forſaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my diſciple."

Would we love God with all our heart, with all our ſoul, and with all our mind; then muſt we, thirdly, love all elſe that merits our eſteem and our affection, principally in regard and in reference to God as the author of it. We may, no doubt,

eſteem and deſire the goods and advantages of the earth in a certain degree, and enjoy them with due moderation. We may delight ourſelves with the beauties and goods that are to be met with in nature, and open our hearts to the innocent chearfulneſs the ſight and enjoyment of them naturally inſpire. But we muſt conſider theſe things as preſents from the Moſt High, as demonſtrations of his love, and allow ourſelves to be moved by them to gratitude, and mutual returns of love. Never muſt we reſt in the creatures, but elevate our reflexions to the Creator, of whoſe bounty and loving-kindneſs all his works bear witneſs. We muſt ſtrive to turn all to his honour and glory; that is, we muſt ſo uſe them as is conformable to his wiſe deſigns and his holy will, and ſo frame our whole behaviour, that others may thence be moved and edified to praiſe our Father in heaven. Thus may the love we bear ourſelves and others, and the taſte we find in the goods

of

of the world, cauſe no diminution of our love towards God. On the contrary, the former will ever more incite us to the latter, will be conſtantly ſupplying it with freſh nouriſhment, and all our propenſions will be united in God as their centre.

Would we, laſtly, love God with all our heart, with all our ſoul, and with all our mind; then muſt our love to him be firm and immutable; it muſt become our predominant propenſity; it muſt diſplay itſelf at all times, and on all occaſions. Vainly does he boaſt of loving God above all things, who one while holds God and his grace, one while the world and its glory, for his higheſt good; who to day makes heaven the object of his deſires, and to-morrow the earth; who now follows the maxims of Religion and Virtue, and then the commands of inordinate paſſion. Vainly does he boaſt of loving God with all his heart, who only does ſo when he ſucceeds in all things, when

when the Lord bleſſes all his undertakings, and ſhowers down benefits on his head; but who cools in his piety and zeal when afflictions come upon him, or murmurs againſt God, and complains of his providence, when he contracts his bounty towards him, and requires ſtronger proofs of his reſignation and obedience. No! the love of the pious towards God is quite otherwiſe framed. Though it be not alike lively at all times, alike ardent and active; though its warmth be at times ſomewhat ſlackened by infirmity and error; yet it ever retains the command in his ſoul. It finds God no leſs venerable and amiable, when as a father he chaſtens his children, as when he covers them with temporal bleſſings. It rejoices, in both caſes, that it ſtands under his inſpection and care; and the expectation of the future world will never allow it to cool. To borrow the expreſſions of Solomon, "It is ſtrong as death, its jealouſy is unrelenting as the grave; the coals thereof

thereof are coals of fire, which hath a moſt vehement flame."

Theſe are the principal properties our love to God muſt have, if it tally with the precept we find in our text. Let us now examine the reaſons which oblige us to ſuch a love towards God. Love is founded on the excellency of its object; or on the cloſe connexion wherein we ſtand towards it; or on the benefits which we receive from it; or on the good we have to hope for from him. In regard to our love for God, all theſe reaſons unite together; and who does not perceive how ſtrong and indiſſoluble they muſt make our obligation thereto?

Where is the Being that is more excellent, more venerable, more amiable than God? Does he not compriſe in himſelf whatever is beautiful, whatever is good, whatever is perfect? Is he not the origin and

and ſource of all the particular beauties and perfections that are diſperſed throughout the world? Nay, of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever! How little, how mean, are all the privileges, all the good qualities, of the beſt, the nobleſt of mortals, when we compare them with the prerogatives and attributes of the Infinite! They vaniſh from our ſight, as the moon and ſtars before the ſplendor of the riſing ſun. All that is great and amiable unite in God. He poſſeſſes all that merits admiration, eſteem, and deſire; and he poſſeſſes it in the ſuperlative degree. Is it a wide-extended, but innoxious and beneficent power, that moves your ſoul, and fills you with admiring awe? God is the Almighty, who doth what he will both in heaven and on the earth. If he ſpeak, it is done; if he command, it ſtands faſt. His dominion is everlaſting; and his kingdom has no end. He rules over all; he controuls and governs all by his good pleaſure. You have not to fear that he

he ſhould miſapply his power. He directs it conſtantly by the eternal and immutable rules of juſtice and equity: it defends, it protects, the pious in the time of need, and is only terrible to the obſtinate ſinner. Is it underſtanding and wiſdom, that excite your eſteem and reverence? God is the only wiſe. He is wonderful in counſel, and excellent in working. Do not heaven and earth bear witneſs; do not all the creatures, both great and ſmall, bear witneſs, the living and the lifeleſs; do not our body and our ſoul bear witneſs in the moſt expreſſive manner, that the Lord has finiſhed all his works in wiſdom? And what are all the ſcattered rays of intellect, of reaſon and ſagacity, which in ſuch various degrees are diſtributed among all kinds and claſſes of rational beings; what are they but effulgencies from this pure and eternal ſource of the light and life of ſpirits? Is it virtue, is it holineſs and juſtice, you revere as the eſſential prerogatives

you

you hold to be the worthieſt object of your inclinations? God is a light, in which there is no ſhade; he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. Juſtice and judgement are the habitation of his throne; and mercy and truth are ever before him. The moſt exalted ſpirits fall down before the ſplendor of his pure and perfect holineſs; they cover their faces and exclaim: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hoſts, the earth is full of thy glory!" Is it, in ſhort, kindneſs and compaſſion, is it affectionate and magnanimous diſpoſitions, that charm you, that captivate your whole heart, that move you with a mild but irreſiſtible force to the moſt reverential love? God is love itſelf. He is merciful and gracious, long-ſuffering, and abundant in goodneſs; keeping mercy for thouſands, forgiving iniquity, and tranſgreſſion, and ſin. From his throne the full unfailing ſtream of life, of joy and happineſs, flows down on all his creatures; and his diſpoſition to beneficence is infinitely

great. Does not a Being that poſſeſſes ſuch attributes, ſuch perfections, deſerve our deepeſt veneration, our moſt ardent love? Muſt we not be inſenſible to all that is beautiful, or good, or excellent, if we do not love God, in whom all theſe unite? if we do not burſt forth in the language of the Pſalmiſt: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I deſire in compariſon of thee!"

Proceed with your reflexions, and conſider the cloſe relation wherein you ſtand towards God; and the multitude, the greatneſs, the high value, of the benefits you have received of his bounty. He is our Creator; we are the work of his hands. He is our Sovereign; and we are his ſubjects. He is our Father; and we his children. Can we be connected with him by ſtronger tyes than theſe? Can any thing give a juſter claim to all the inclinations of our heart, than this natural and indiſſoluble relation

relation gives? And is he not the kindeſt, the moſt bountiful Lord, the tendereſt and moſt affectionate Father, our underſtandings can conceive? Is it not he to whom we are indebted for life and breath, to whom we owe all the capacities, all the powers, all the privileges, that ennoble our nature, and exalt us ſo far above the brute creation? Is it not he who conſtantly preſerves and provides for us, from whom every good and perfect gift proceeds, who daily opens his hand, and fills every living thing with good? Is it not he to whom we are obliged for all that can any way render our abode on earth convenient and agreeable? he who has given the heavens their ſplendor, the ſun its light, the earth its abundance, the plants their beauties and virtues, the animals their fitneſs for our uſe, and to men their inventive induſtry? Is it not he who ſpares us ſo often when we deſerve puniſhment, who bears with us to the extreme of forbearance, and is ever giving

giving us freſh reſpite for repentance and amendment? And how frequently has he given up particular proofs of his protection in danger, of his help in diſtreſs, of his ſtrength in our weakneſs! Who of us has not experienced, that he is nigh unto ſuch as call upon him, that he hears ſupplication and prayer, and that none was ever put to confuſion that truſted in him? And what terms ſhall I uſe to expreſs the unmerited, and ineſtimable tokens of grace he has given us all, as ſinners? Where is there a maſter who has dealt ſo with his ſervants, a father with his children, as God has dealt with us, while we were yet his foes? On our account, he ſpared not the Son of his love; he ſent him to us, to be our teacher and guide; for us he gave him up to death, an ignominious and a painful death. He announced, and taught us to implore, the life of the Spirit, the grace of heaven, the forgiveneſs of ſins, and everlaſting bliſs. So ſoon as we turn to him in penitential

faith, ſo ſoon as we forſake the way of unrighteouſneſs and ruin, ſo ſoon as we convert ourſelves to him with all our heart; then will he have mercy upon us, remember our iniquities no more, and vouchſafe us his favour: we ſhall again have free acceſs to heaven, and be happy in communion with him. He himſelf will come to our relief, and aſſiſt us by his ſpirit in the work of our ſanctification, and bear with the imperfection of our obedience, if it be but ſincere. Never will he allow us to be tempted above what we are able; and, under his inſpection and conduct, we ſhall hereafter infallibly gain poſſeſſion of the glorious inheritance he has prepared for us in heaven. How great, how inexpreſſibly great, are all theſe benefits and bleſſings! how far above all our merits, and beyond our expectations! What can charm us to gratitude and love, if theſe conſiderations cannot? Yes, thou, O God, art perfectly compaſſionate, thou alone art worthy that we ſhould love thee

thee with all our ſoul, with all our mind, and with all our powers. To thee belongs our heart, all our inclinations belong to thee; and we ſhould be the moſt ungrateful, the baſeſt of all thy creatures, if we did not love thee, who haſt firſt ſo much loved us.

If, on theſe arguments, you cannot deny the obligation you are under to love God; then ſtill ſubjoin the intrinſic excellency and the manifold utility of this virtue. This conſideration will yield a new degree of force to theſe arguments. What can more delightfully employ the ſoul of a reaſonable and virtuous man; what is more adapted to elevate and enlarge all his capacities and powers; what can procure him a more pure, a more noble, a more ſenſible pleaſure; than the love of a God who poſſeſſes all the advantages and attributes which only merit love in the ſupreme degree, without limitation and change; who

is the everflowing and inexhauſtible ſource of all light, all life, all joy, all happineſs; whoſe goodneſs and grace continue for ever and ever; and who will never ceaſe to bleſs his friends and worſhipers, and to make them happy? O what bleſſed hours the pious paſs in contemplating the perfection of their God, in his temple, in his ſervice, in his converſe! O what heavenly joys they feel, when, aſſured of the divine complacency, they draw nigh to the Sovereign Ruler of the world, and have communion with him! Who has ever enjoyed theſe delights without giving them the higheſt preference before all others? In the enjoyment of them, who has ever felt that void and langour which uſually accompany all ſenſual and earthly tranſports?

What, farther, is more adapted to facilitate to us the practice of all the virtues, the diſcharge of all our duties, than the love towards God? Love is one of the ſtrongeſt

ſtrongeſt and moſt active ſenſations. It finds nothing impracticable, nothing difficult, that tends to the advancement of its deſigns. It boldly encounters every obſtruction and every hardſhip; and overcomes them all, if they are not unconquerable in their nature. And ſhall the love to God be leſs courageous? No! If it have once poſſeſſion of our ſoul, if it preſide and govern in it; then ſhall we truly ſay, from experience, with the apoſtle: "His commandments are not grievous." It will be our comfort to do what is right. We ſhall be more than conquerors in all things, through him that loved us. The motives to goodneſs will never fail us; and theſe motives will far more forcibly act upon us, than all human laws, than habit, and honour. They will never leave us uncertain or dubious, how we ſhould behave in this or the other event. Animated by its vigour, we ſhall perform our duty at all times, in all places, in all circumſtances,

and towards all men, with joy. We ſhall be ſtedfaſt and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Yet more. Is it not the love to God which gives our piety and virtue their greateſt value, and turns them into an offering in the ſight of the Lord, which is agreeable and well-pleaſing to him? We will not indeed pronounce him to be vicious, who eſchews evil and does good more from fear of puniſhment than out of love towards God; who in the acquittance of his duty looks more to himſelf and his preſent or future advantage, than to God and his will. No! he is in the way of virtue; and the longer he purſues it, the more pleaſant will he find it, and the more will his ſentiments be refined and exalted. But as great as the difference is between children and ſervants, ſo great is the privilege of the pious, whoſe whole heart is devoted to God, and who obey

him

him with pleaſure and joy, above his who forbears to tranſgreſs the divine commands, more becauſe he cannot eſcape unpuniſhed, than becauſe they are the commands of the adorable and moſt amiable Being. And may not the former promiſe himſelf a far higher degree of the divine complacency than the other can pretend to? Shall not the former be capable of a far ſuperior bliſs in the future world than this?

What, finally, is more adapted to comfort us in all adverſities, to render us firm and undaunted in every danger, and to give us the moſt certain hope of the completeſt happineſs, than love towards God? When can we be wanting in conſolation, in ſupport, and aſſiſtance, in what circumſtances can we fail of being happy, if we are in union with God, the Sovereign Good, if we belong to the number of his friends? What glorious promiſes in this reſpect are not made us? "The Lord," ſays the

Pſalmiſt, "preſerveth all them that love him." "I will be a father unto you, and ye ſhall be my ſons and daughters," ſaith the Lord Almighty. "To them that love God," as the Apoſtle affirms, "all things ſhall work together for good." That which no eye has ſeen, which no ear has heard, which no human heart has ever conceived, has God prepared for them that love him. The heavens ſtand always open to them, and they will lay hold on the crown of life, which God has promiſed to them that love him.

Ye ſinners, who have hitherto been indifferent and inſenſible towards God, you who refuſe him your heart and your love, ſee what ſacred duties you have acted againſt, what great prerogatives and pleaſures you have hitherto miſſed. Should you not be aſhamed of ſuch an unjuſt and unnatural conduct? Should not the abſence of ſuch prerogatives and pleaſures affect you?

you? Can the world forſooth, can ſin, make you ample compenſation? Can they afford you the real, the laſting ſatisfaction you look for in them? Oh, be no longer deceived! Haſte, by an actual repentance and converſion, to the God whom you have forſaken. Lament, that you have ſo long denied him your love, which he alone deſerves; that you have laviſhed it on things that are not worthy of it. Conſecrate your heart to him, with all its inclinations and deſires. Carefully apply to all the means which may produce and excite this love towards God. And what are theſe means? An attentive conſideration of the amiable attributes of God, a continued meditation on his manifold and ineſtimable benefits. Love muſt be founded on a knowledge of the eminent qualities of its object; it muſt ſee them in a brilliant and affecting light; it muſt compare them with others, leſs good, leſs beautiful, leſs perfect. Strive therefore to know God aright.

Attend

Attend to the inſtruction he grants us both in nature and his word. Seek to form juſt, worthy, grand conceptions of him and his attributes. Never repreſent him to you under the horrible image of an auſtere and inexorable deſpot, who is more ſolicitous to diſplay his unbounded authority and power, than to act in wiſdom, juſtice, and loving-kindneſs; who does not exerciſe his government upon reaſons and deſigns, but upon the dictates of arbitrary caprice; who diſtributes proſperity and misfortunes among his ſubjects, without any regard to their conduct. This idea, which Reaſon and Scripture diſclaim, would not beget love, but a ſlaviſh fear, in your ſoul. Reflect upon God as he actually is, as a Being poſſeſſed, not only of ſovereign might, but alſo of the moſt conſummate wiſdom, the pureſt holineſs and juſtice, and of goodneſs, grace, and mercy. Obſerve the manifold and glorious demonſtrations of them in the creation, in providence, in the miſſion of Jeſus.

Hold

Hold up the greateſt prerogatives of the wiſeſt and holieſt, the beſt of all mankind, againſt them; and draw from thence the concluſion, how much more the Moſt High deſerves our love, than all that here on earth can ſhew the juſteſt title to it. Strive, farther, to ſet your gratitude in motion towards this Sovereign Being. Call to mind the multitude, the greatneſs, the exalted value, of the benefits you daily and hourly receive from God; and at the ſame time recollect your own unworthineſs, your ſins and failings, whereby you have ſo often offended your kindeſt benefactor; and the infinite diſtance there is between God and you. Revolve it frequently in your mind, how vain and fugacious are all the goods and advantages of the world; and how inſufficient they are to give you peace, to repleniſh your vaſt deſires, and to render you truly happy. Let the public as well as the private exerciſes of Religion and worſhip be among your chief concerns; and never

never neglect them without the weightieſt cauſe. If you contemplate theſe objects; if you perform theſe exerciſes with becoming attention; if you frequently repeat them; if you accompany them with humble and earneſt prayer for the divine benediction: then will they aſſuredly make a ſalutary impreſſion on your heart; they will kindle in it the flame of heavenly love, and procure it food continually.

You know, ye upright lovers of your God, how well theſe means are adapted to awaken and to ſupport that love. It behoves you well to take heed that you never become ſlothful and indolent in the uſe of theſe means. You know how happy he is, in whom the love of God abides. Strive to preſerve this happineſs with all poſſible care, ſtrive ever to enjoy it in a ſuperior degree. Beware chiefly of ſin, which always draws you off from God, and weakens the ſentiment of acceptance with him. Are

you ſtill conſtrained to ſigh over various infirmities, many imperfections and failings; yet let them not make you deſpond. Rather redouble your ardour in goodneſs, and chear yourſelves with the hope of that bleſſed ſtate, where you will ſee your Creator face to face, where you will more worthily love him, where you will be perfectly happy in the undiſturbed enjoyment of his love. May he, the God of everlaſting mercy, make us all partakers of that tranſporting bliſs! To Him be glory and adoration for ever! Amen.

THE

THE SHORTNESS AND TROUBLE OF LIFE.

Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble. Job xiv. 1.

THE SHORTNESS AND TROUBLE OF LIFE.

THE remark, that the knowledge and the behaviour of men may frequently contradict each other, is no leſs juſt than lamentable. Whoever beſtows but the ſlighteſt obſervation on the whole of their conduct, nay, he that pays but attention to himſelf, will always find examples enough of this contradiction. I will at preſent only notice one that immediately relates to my purpoſe. How general is the conviction of the ſhortneſs of human life,

and of the certainty of death! Who has ever doubted of theſe truths? Does not the monarch know that he is mortal, as well as his ſlave? Is not the whole human race of one accord in this, that we have here no abiding city? How wiſe, how virtuous, how happy, would men be, were their conduct conformable to this conviction! But how rarely is this the caſe! Do not the generality live as if their life were never to have an end? They even not unfrequently form deſigns, and lay down plans, which would demand whole ages to accompliſh; and the more their years advance, the greater and more extenſive are uſually their undertakings and aims. Their thirſt after wealth and honours daily becomes more vehement and inſatiable; and never do they long for them with greater ardour, than when they ought to reflect that they have not much more time to enjoy them. Their ſolicitude about all that relates to their temporal welfare increaſes

in

in proportion as their wants diminiſh; and never do men make greater preparations for a quiet and undiſturbed enjoyment of life, than when their age, and the decay of faculties, tell them, that the term of it muſt be at hand. So manifeſt is the contradiction that, in this reſpect, ſubſiſts between the knowledge and the conduct of mankind. They deny not the truth of what we advance; but they let it lie torpid within them. They put away the thoughts of death from them as far as ever they can; and the leſs they have reaſon to doubt of their mortality, ſo much the more diligently do they avoid turning their attention towards this inſtructive, but to them terrible monitor. And yet it is impoſſible for us to underſtand the value and deſign of life; it is impoſſible for us properly to uſe the advantages of it, and to be duly prepared for the eternity to which we are haſtening, if we have not a lively conviction of the ſhort duration, and the imperfection, of our

preſent ſtate, as the ground of all our views and actions. Can we do better, then, than devote ſome moments of the preſent hours of devotion to the recollection of theſe wholeſome truths, and inform ourſelves of the influence they ſhould have upon our hearts and our manners? Our text conducts us to theſe reflexions. It contains two important axioms:

The former relates to the ſhortneſs of our life. Man that is born of a woman, is of few days.

The other relates to the troubles and hardſhips that are connected with the preſent life. Man that is born of a woman, is full of trouble.

Our life is of ſhort duration. This is the firſt truth our text invites us to conſider. A truth which certainly requires no copious demonſtration. We have no more to

do

do than to ſet it in its proper light; and to this the following remarks will be amply ſufficient: A moderate attention to the fortunes and the end of our fellow-creatures will teach us, that the greateſt part of them are ſnatched away by death, while children. Scarcely have they felt their earthly exiſtence; ſcarcely have they caſt a few confuſed glances on the things that ſurround them; ſcarcely have they won the heart of their parents by their innocent endearments: but they muſt quit the ſcene, and exchange the light of the ſun, which inſpired them with joy, for the darkneſs of the grave. They are born; they ſuffer pain; their deſires awake; they begin to think, and to wiſh; and ere their thoughts are formed, ere their wiſhes are gratified, death overtakes them, and their life, which was no more than a dream, is come to an end. It is like a flower, which withers before its leaves can unfold. What a conſiderable portion of mankind drop into the

grave in their earlieſt and livelieſt youth! The alert and playful ſtripling feels his force. His underſtanding and his reaſon grow more active and buſy. He is attentive to what paſſes without and within him. The beauties of nature, the agreeableneſſes of ſocial life, affect him; and the deſire of happineſs diſplays itſelf in all its vigour. He looks for pleaſure, he even taſtes it. He begins to reflect on himſelf; and, in thoſe fortunate moments, when his rational ſpirit exerts its authority over ſenſual appetite, he reflects on the ends of his being. He is on the way to their diſcovery, and to form juſt conceptions of the purpoſes and the uſes of life. Now he reſolves to reduce his wild inſtincts to order, and to ſtudy the means of acquiring ſubſtantial happineſs. But death takes him away, the leaſt of all things to be foreſeen; and he muſt relinquiſh the earth, when he was only beginning to reliſh its goods, and to lay the foundation of his future well-being. Thus often does a

roſe unfold its leaves in the morning dawn, and droop and fade before the ſun has reached his meridian height.—But now the ſtripling has attained the age of manhood; he has eſcaped the moſt dangerous periods. Now he begins in reality to live. He acts ſeriouſly and conſiderately. He intends to make a rational choice of his occupations and pleaſures, and to avoid the follies of youth. His happineſs ſhall no longer conſiſt in the ſports of fancy, or depend upon events. He will build it on a firm and laſting foundation. He forms to his mind an extenſive, and, as he thinks, an infallible plan, for acquiring what he denominates welfare and happineſs, and actually labours with much effort in the execution of it. But all at once a violent ſickneſs comes on him, and he dies in the midſt of the greateſt preparations for the comfort of his future days. Death renders all his ſchemes abortive; and the fruits he promiſed himſelf from his endeavours are

buried with him. Thus are by far the greateſt part of mortals hurried away from this ſtate of exiſtence, before they rightly know that they are alive, or in a few years after they learnt to underſtand the purpoſes, the advantages, and the affairs of life. But few men, comparatively, attain to the years which we uſually term an advanced age. However, ſuppoſe a man to have paſſed through all the gradations; let him have ſpun out his terrene life as far as he may in the ordinary courſe of things: how ſhort, how momentary, will the duration of it appear to him, when, arrived at his latter days, he looks back on the paſt! And, in fact, what a ſhort period is ſeventy or eighty years to a man that has a rational ſoul, and never properly lives like a man, but when he is actually conſcious of it! It is true, the generality of animals do not arrive at this period, and muſt much earlier give place to ſucceeding generations. If we conſider man merely in his animal nature,

nature, he has, even in this article, a conſiderable advantage above the other creatures that ſurround him. But, conſider him, as he actually is, as an intelligent and rational being, that is conſcious of himſelf, and whoſe life conſiſts more in the activity of his mind, than in the circulation of his blood, and the movement of his body; and you muſt deduct much from the apparent amount of his days. The years of infancy and childhood, in which we cannot properly apply our nobler capacities, and act more from blind inſtinct than from conſideration, muſt be ſubtracted from that ſum, as well as the years of extreme old age, when our powers are decayed and our ſpirits benumbed, and we are not unfrequently reduced to the lamentable condition of an infantine weakneſs and imbecillity. The remainder then is nothing but youth and the manly age, which a man can reckon his actual

life

life upon earth. But even the greateſt part of this time flirts away, without our enjoying it with a ſatisfaction proportionate to our exalted vocation. Deduct from it the years we are deprived of by ſleep, the brother of death. Deduct from it the days we paſs in diſeaſes and pain. Deduct from it, in fine, the hours we ſigh out in ſorrow and trouble, and which rather reſemble a lingering death, than an actual life. How ſmall will be the total number of days which remain after theſe deductions, and deſerve the name of a rational and happy life! Certainly, our life is ſhort in reference to the many and important affairs we have to tranſact; it is inſtantaneous in regard to our ſoul, which is formed for immortality: it is undiſcernible, it is nothing, in compariſon with the eternity and immutability of the Sovereign Being. The writers of the Sacred Book ſeem at a loſs, as it were, for terms and images to deſcribe in lively colours the uncertainty

of

of our abode upon earth. Job ſays, "Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth as a ſhadow, and continueth not." "Behold," ſays David to the Almighty, "thou haſt made my days as an hand-breath, and mine age is as nothing before thee." "As for man," he aſſerts in another place, "his days are as graſs; as a flower of the field, ſo he flouriſheth. For the wind paſſeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof ſhall know it no more. Man is like a thing of nought: his time paſſeth away like a ſhadow." This is the firſt conſideration for convincing us of the vanity and emptineſs of our terreſtrial life, and for inſpiring us with a longing for a better ſtate. Our life is of very ſhort and uncertain duration.

But this is not all. Were the few moments we have here to paſs a ſucceſſion of

of agreeable ſenſations and fortunate occurrences, we might perhaps be allowed to forget the ſhortneſs of it. But is not the caſe very different with our preſent condition? How many evils and dangers, how many calamities and troubles, is not man ſubject to from his birth to his death? How often are his joys converted into ſorrows! How much is he curtailed of his pleaſure by the diſguſt that either mixes with it, or ariſes from it! "Man that is born of a woman," ſays our text, "is of few days, and full of trouble." Let us proceed now to conſider ſomewhat cloſely, the lot of man on this ſide alſo, by caſting a look on the inevitable miſery he is expoſed to here on earth. I do not ſpeak at preſent of the extraordinary misfortunes which this or the other man, this or the other particular ſociety, meets with. I ſpeak not of the deplorable lot of thoſe mortals who are forced by injuſtice to paſs their days in bonds of ſlavery, in gloomy dungeons,

geons, in continual fear of death; or of the ſtill more miſerable ſlaves of vice, who, by their horrible exceſſes, have plunged themſelves into utter ruin. Theſe are quite particular caſes, which ſtand in no neceſſary connexion with our preſent condition. I treat of mankind in general; and my aim is to call your attention to thoſe circumſtances and adverſe events, which are common to all, and to every one, though in divers degrees. Every ſtage of human life ſupplies me with particular evidence of the great imperfection of our terreſtrial life.

Conſider the new-born babe, and bewail the doleful ſight. He has neither ſenſe nor ſtrength to ſupport his life, and ſcarcely has he perceived the light, but he already is in danger of loſing it. Cries and lamentations are the firſt ſounds of his voice: his firſt breath is uttered in complaints. He feels, already, that he has entered on a ſtate that is beſet by a thouſand diſtreſſes

and

and troubles. Unable to aſſiſt himſelf, he wholly depends, in all reſpects, on extraneous help. Heat and cold, hunger and thirſt, would ſoon deſtroy him, did not the tenderneſs of his parents, or the compaſſion of the by-ſtanders, ſtep in to his relief. But the mitigation of the pain he feels, and which he expreſſes by weeping and wailing, is not always to be compaſſed by the moſt ſedulous care, ſince the cauſe of it cannot be known. So pitiable is the entrance of man on the ſtage of the world! So miſerable does he paſs the firſt years of his being! Man, who is ordained the lord of the creation, is, in his infancy, much weaker and more neceſſitous than any of the creatures. Through numberleſs accidents and dangers he grows up, and ſtill is dependent and feeble; ſtill ignorant of the means of ſupplying his wants; ſtill incapable of guarding his health and his life. His ideas are obſcure and confuſed; his deſires reach not much farther than the

inſtinct

inſtinct of irrational animal life; his pleaſure conſiſts in inſignificant trifles; his occupations are laughable follies. He admires every thing, and knows nothing. He longs for every thing, and underſtands not the true uſe of any thing. Truth and error are things indifferent to him; and the rectitude of his actions is ſolely determined by the blame or applauſe of his tutors. He lives whole years ere he knows that he is alive, ere he has the faintеſt idea of the deſign of his being.

At length he arrives at the years of diſcretion. His underſtanding unfolds; his conceptions are clearer; his reaſon has more ſhare in his concluſions and actions. He is more independent, and a part of his deportment and procedures are left to his own diſcernment. He feels his powers; his taſte takes a change; his deſires grow vehement, and he knows how they are to be gratified. He now thinks himſelf happy,

as the years of conſtraint and ſubjection are over. But he commonly ruſhes into a harder bondage than that he bore in his childhood. Full of confidence in his imaginary wiſdom, he makes his appearance in the great world; and yet is woefully ignorant both of himſelf and mankind. Here he is encompaſſed on all ſides with ſnares and deceits, which even the moſt experienced cannot always elude or detect. The appetites are clamorous, and their gratification puts on the appearance of allowable youthful frolicks; they promiſe him raviſhing joys; and as ſoon as he yields to their promiſes, he finds himſelf miſerably deluded. The calm repoſe that gladdened his innocent heart is gone; furious paſſions carry him captive, and he ſhortly becomes the wretched ſlave of theſe cruel, relentleſs tyrants. One day cheated by hope, the next confounded by fear. One moment dejected with ſorrow, the next elated with joy. Now tormented by ambition,

bition, then tranſported with rage; one while enflamed with the luſt of revenge, then corroded by envy, then tortured by love. His health is impaired, his powers decline; and he is ſtill as remote from the happineſs he aims at, as ever he was before. He has loſt the command of himſelf; and the diſcord, the conflicts, that ariſe in his propenſions, debilitate his ſoul, render him incapable of all real pleaſure, and never deſiſt, till he has learnt to maſter himſelf, and to abhor his exceſſes.

Now follow the years of manhood; and he finds himſelf obliged, by weariſome toil, by cloſe application, to provide for the future. He enters upon new connections, which lay him under new obligations, and bring with them new incumbrances. He is citizen, father, maſter; and, though theſe relations open various ſources of pleaſure to him, which he never has known before, yet they commonly

likewiſe augment his troubles and cares. The maintenance of his domeſtic œconomy, the diſcharge of his office, the concerns of his buſineſs, demand the exertion of all his powers; and not ſeldom is he obliged to deny his moſt darling propenſities, for the ſake of performing his duty to others. He now finds it hard to procure ſuſtenance for himſelf and his family, and is forced to eat his bread in the ſweat of his brow. Now he runs the hazard of loſing his property, and to fall into want, by misfortune or fraud. Now diſtempers and pain prevent him from following his vocation, and enjoying the accommodations of life. Then his honour is attacked; his good name is brought into queſtion; his repoſe is diſturbed by litigations and quarrels; his adverſaries ſeek to compaſs his ruin. He ſees very often the failure of his honeſt and prudent undertakings; and even the perſons with whom he is the moſt cloſely connected, cauſe him at times the moſt pungent

gent afflictions. Amidſt all theſe turns and hardſhips, his years are ſtill advancing. At length the days come on, when he ſays, "I have no pleaſure in them." The ſenſes grow dull, and incapable of reliſhing the recreations ordained to alleviate the tedium of life. The intellect is frequently weak, and the man ſinks into a ſtate of helpleſſneſs like that of his childhood. He may even become an object of ſcorn and deriſion to them who are under moſt obligations to him. His body is in a ſtate of decay, and bends towards the grave under the preſſure of accumulated evils. His temper is peeviſh; he is out of humour with himſelf, and with all the world. He torments himſelf with groundleſs ſuſpicions, and wears out the remains of his faculties by extravagant complainings, or by ſecret ſorrow. He is timorous, and the mere ſhadow of danger confounds him with terror and diſmay. In this manner does a man but too often paſs the concluding

ing ſcene of his life, and quits at length the turbulent ſtage, on which he has performed ſo many different parts, and has experienced ſo many changes of fortune; demonſtration enough, that our earthly life is not only very ſhort and frail, but is interwoven, withal, with miſeries of various kinds, which indeed are not met with by all men in the ſame proportion, but are yet to be wholly avoided by none.

But is our life then, in and of itſelf, interwoven with ſo many difficulties, dangers, and evils; oh, then, let us never add to their number by a diſorderly and vicious behaviour! The natural evils that are in the world, are incomparably much ſmaller and eaſier to be borne, than the ſad effects of ſin, for which we have only to thank our own abuſe of the faculties and freedom with which we are endowed. Sin is the deſtruction of man. The unruly paſſions by which we allow ourſelves to be ſwayed,

are

are the moſt horrible enemies to our quiet and happineſs; they are the moſt abundant ſources of every kind of woe; they deſtroy not only our temporal welfare, but their baleful conſequences extend even into eternity. So long as a man is the ſlave to his luſts, ſo long of neceſſity muſt he be wretched. Let us then uſe all diligence to ſet ourſelves looſe from theſe cruel ſhackles. Let us punctually apply to the means which Revelation affords us for moderating our propenſions and inſtincts, and generouſly ſtruggle for real freedom. Thus will the principal ſources of our misfortunes be ſtopped, and we ſhall effectually ceaſe to be wretched. A pious and virtuous conduct muſt, on the other hand, infallibly lighten the unavoidable hardſhips of life, and ſweeten the bitterneſs of it. The rules of virtue, and the fear of God, alone are able to conduct us on this ſtormy ſea, and give us ſecurity in every danger: they alone are able to maintain our hearts

in peace, and procure us the enjoyment of a real and laſting pleaſure: they alone can render tolerable the adverſe events that befall us, and inſpire us with comfort and courage even amidſt the moſt grievous afflictions: they never forſake their faithful votaries: they even ſtand by him in the greateſt of dangers: give yourſelves up to their wiſe direction: follow their friendly advice. Then, if you cannot be entirely exempt from the imperfections, the troubles, of your preſent condition, yet you will certainly feel them in a much ſmaller degree.

Is our life ſo ſhort and frail; how irrational then muſt it be, to confine our hopes to theſe few moments, and to ſeek the whole of our happineſs here on earth! The goods of this world are not ſufficient to content our ſoul: they are neither adequate to its capacities, nor yet to its deſires. We undervalue ourſelves

in

in attempting to build our felicity on the inſtable poſſeſſion and enjoyment of theſe fugacious things. No! we are framed for eternity. Our preſent condition is only a ſtate of preparation and practice: it only contains the firſt outſet of a life which is never to come to an end. The Chriſtian Revelation points out to us an everlaſting, a conſummately perfect life, that awaits us beyond the grave; a life that will be as rich in unabated joy and real pleaſure, as the preſent can be fertile in evils and pains. This bleſſed, this unchangeable life, ſhould be the object of our deſires, our deſigns, and endeavours; it ſhould be the principal ground of our hopes and our comfort. Let us then tread with joy the way that leads thereto, and never turn from it to the right hand or to the left. Jeſus Chriſt has gone this way before us, and now calls to us from the throne of his glory: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." He will ſupport us

himſelf by his power, and carry us through all temptations. Nay, under his protection, we ſhall undauntedly meet death, which threatens us with total deſtruction; and we, who look not at viſible, but at inviſible things, ſhall hereafter exchange the ſufferings of time, and the ſorrows of life, for an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory.

Your temporal proſperity is, doubtleſs, a proper object of your deſires and endeavours. And it gives me at all times a ſenſible pleaſure, when God allows you to ſucceed in your outward affairs; when he beſtows upon you health and ſtrength, peace and contentment; when he averts from you all harms and loſſes, crowns your honeſt undertakings with a proſperous iſſue, and grants you to enjoy the fruit of your labour and toil with contented and chearful hearts; and I humbly implore him, our kind and bountiful God, that

that he may be pleaſed to vouchſafe you an ample meaſure of earthly bleſſings, may guard with his mighty protection both you and your families, may conſtantly increaſe your trade and commerce, refuſe all evil an entrance to your dwellings, and grant you all that which is moſt uſeful and profitable to each according to his particular neceſſities. But it is my moſt fervent prayer, that your immortal ſpirits may be ſaved, that you may ever become more wiſe and virtuous, and be fitted and approved of for that everlaſting happineſs to which, as Chriſtians, you are called. All things elſe endure but for a little while. They vaniſh away like a dream; they leave their poſſeſſor, and cannot help him in death. It is only the grace of God, only a good conſcience, only a virtuous and holy life, only the hope of eternal bliſs, that remain with us even in death, that go with us into the future world, and there make the foundation of our ſupreme felicity.

O Al-

O Almighty God, who alone canſt order the unruly wills and affections of ſinful men; grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandeſt, and deſire that which thou doſt promiſe; that ſo, among the ſundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may ſurely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found, through Jeſus Chriſt, our Lord. Amen.

OF

THE FUTURE

GENERAL JUDGMENT.

Becauſe he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead.

Acts xvii. 31.

OF

THE FUTURE GENERAL JUDGMENT.

THE diſcourſe of the Apoſtle from whence the text is taken, is extremely remarkable, no leſs on account of its contents, than of the particular circumſtances in which it was delivered. St. Paul pronounced it at Athens; a city which had long been the principal reſidence of the ſciences and the finer arts, and was the ſtandard of good taſte and poliſhed manners; a city where every branch of learning flouriſhed, where philoſophers of various ſects abounded; a city, withal, that was

was filled with idols, and where idolatry and ſuperſtition bore almoſt an unlimited ſway. He held this diſcourſe in preſence of the moſt reſpectable perſonages of the nation, before thoſe famous Athenian judges who had the inſpection and care of the public worſhip, and whoſe ſentences were regarded as the decrees of juſtice and equity. Before this tribunal the meſſenger of Jeſus was cited to appear. Here he was commanded to give an account of the doctrine he preached; and they would determine, whether it were of ſuch a nature as might conſiſt with their Religion and government. With what prudence, with what earneſtneſs, with what energy, does he here maintain the character he bore! How gladly does he ſeize the opportunity, and how wiſely does he make uſe of it, for combating error, for bearing witneſs to the truth, and for promoting the good cauſe of the Lord, by whom he was ſent! He ſtrives, before all things, to excite their

attention, and to remove the prejudices they had conceived againſt him. He next ſtates the principles of Natural Religion, and the reaſonable ſervice of God in their ſtrongeſt light, and prepares thereby for the reception of the Goſpel he announced to mankind in the name of Chriſt. We will hear him himſelf, and briefly paraphraſe his ſpeech. We ſhall be forced to admire what he utters. "Ye Athenians," ſays he, "you accuſe me of the deſign of introducing new and foreign idols; but I muſt confeſs, that the number of them is already much greater among you than I could wiſh. Incredulity on this head can never, moſt certainly, be made your reproach. It even appears to me as if you far exceeded other nations in your reverence for what relates to Religion. For, as lately I paſſed the public place, and contemplated the objects of your worſhip, I ſaw, among others, an altar whereon was inſcribed, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now this God, whom you worſhip

worſhip without knowing him, this very God would I bring to your acquaintance. He it is who created the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, and who, by his providence, preſerves and governs all. But the Great Creator and Ruler of the world cannot poſſibly be confined to a temple made with human hands. The whole extent of heaven cannot contain him. He ſubſiſts of himſelf; he is ſufficient to himſelf, and his perfection and felicity are incapable of addition. He has no need that men ſhould ſerve him, that they ſhould bring him food, and gifts, and oblations. He himſelf has given to all the life, the breath, and whatever they poſſeſs; and they depend entirely on him. He has made all men to proceed from one. He has diſtributed them into numerous tribes and nations, and has given them to inhabit the earth. He has already, according to his infinite wiſdom, appointed to each the time when he ſhall appear on this

ſcene,

ſcene, and when he ſhall quit it, has previouſly decreed the place he ſhall fill thereon, and the manner in which he ſhall live. His deſign in all this was, that they might ſeek him, that they might acknowledge his exiſtence and his perfection, that they might obey him, and be happy in his grace. It is likewiſe not ſo very difficult to arrive at this knowledge. All the works of creation teſtify of him, and praiſe his unbounded grandeur, though he himſelf be inviſible to the eyes of mortals. Whoever reflects with becoming attention on himſelf, and the things about him, muſt of neceſſity diſcover him, and meet on all hands with demonſtrations of his power and goodneſs. For he is not far from every one of us. He is every where preſent. In him we have our being, in him we live and move. We derive our origin from him, as ſome of your own poets have ſaid. If then we be deſcended from him; if he be the God of ſpirits, as well as of all fleſh; if he be the ſource of all thoſe prerogatives we poſſeſs as ra-

tional creatures; if in this reſpect we bear his image: then is it impoſſible for him to be like ſuch things as human ingenuity can frame of gold or ſilver, of wood or ſtone, though ever ſo artificial and finiſhed in their ſculpture. The ſenſuality to which the greateſt part of mankind are ever prone, indeed, held them long in this erroneous opinion; but God, who beheld theſe times of ignorance with the utmoſt diſpleaſure, has, from his boundleſs compaſſion and mercy, in our days ſo plainly, and with ſo much certainty, revealed, that he only commands all men to repent, and to forſake their idolatry with the reſt of their vices. For he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs by a man, namely, Chriſt, whom he has ordained to that purpoſe. And of this arrangement he has given the moſt credible and authentic evidence, in that he has raiſed him from the dead." Here the Apoſtle was interrupted in his diſcourſe, when, as it

ſhould

ſhould appear, he was going to propound more circumſtantially the important doctrine, that Jeſus is the Son of God, the Saviour and Lord of mankind. Some, probably of the Epicureans, who, that they might more quietly follow their luſts, wholly denied the future exiſtence, made ſport of what he ſaid; others, very likely the Stoics, who, on this head, had juſter ideas, and were more impartial, were deſirous of farther inſtructions from him; ſeveral again, among whom was Dionyſius, a diſtinguiſhed member of the Areopagus, actually became converts to Chriſt. We will at preſent confine ourſelves to the latter part of the ſpeech of St. Paul, and treat it ſomewhat at large for our edification. May theſe conſiderations make ſuch an impreſſion on us, as nothing ſhall enfeeble or efface, as ſhall remain fixed and engraven on our hearts, and be the directing principle of our whole behaviour!

The important doctrine contained in our text may be reduced to the following five particulars: there will infallibly be a future judgment: this judgment will be general, and extend to the whole human race: righteouſneſs and equity will paſs ſentence in it: Chriſt, who is the Son of God, and at the ſame time the ſon of man, will hold this judgment: hereof has God given us the moſt certain and undeniable demonſtration, in that he has raiſed him from the dead. Theſe five particulars muſt be briefly ſtated and explained, for evincing the juſtneſs and energy of that part of the Apoſtle's ſpeech we have juſt delivered to you.

The light of nature already ſupplies us with ſeveral forcible arguments for convincing us, that after this life there will be another ſtate, and therefore alſo a judgment, which will chiefly conſiſt in allotting and adjuſting this ſtate of mankind, according

cording to the texture of their foregoing behaviour. I ſhall not at preſent appeal to the univerſal belief of antient and modern nations, of whoſe religious opinions we have any ample account; as it may very well be, that they all have drawn theſe doctrines from one and the ſame fountain, I mean a divine revelation promulgated in early times. I will merely propoſe the nature of man, and his portion here on earth, for confirming this matter. With ever ſo moderate a knowledge of ourſelves, we cannot deny that we are moral creatures, that is, ſuch creatures as may and ſhould act not from blind impulſe, or from an inevitable neceſſity, but from diſcernment and according to laws, and which conſequently are capable of giving up an account, and of a certain retribution. The difference between virtue and vice, between right and wrong, is founded in the nature of things; it is eternal and unalterable; and we have the means of perceiving this difference, and

of regulating our behaviour by it. We ſee what is good or bad, what is becoming or unbecoming, what is conformable or contrary to the relations wherein we ſtand towards God and towards our neighbour: we can chuſe the former, and reject the latter; we can obey the gentle voice of conſcience, which incites us to the former, and terrifies us from the latter, or we can oppoſe it: we can judge whether our actions deſerve praiſe or cenſure, reward or puniſhment; and this judgment always produces, when any attention is given it, agreeable or diſagreeable ſenſations, ſerenity and ſatisfaction, or diſquiet and remorſe. But has God, who is wiſdom itſelf, made us moral creatures, and capable of rendering account, without treating us as ſuch, and actually requiring of us this account? Or, ſhall it be of the ſame import with him, the pureſt and holieſt Being, how we apply the capacities and powers with which he has endowed us? of like import whether we obſerve the

laws he has preſcribed us, or not? whether we reach the ends to which he has ordained us, or deviate farther and farther from them? Shall he, who governs the world, be an unconcerned ſpectator of the good and evil that happens in it? Shall the God, in whoſe empire the moſt beautiful order and harmony on all ſides prevail, be only indifferent to moral diſorders, which are certainly the moſt pernicious of all? Shall all things, the very meaneſt not excepted, be under his inſpection; and man, ennobled by reaſon and liberty, be abandoned to himſelf? Shall he dare to conduct himſelf arbitrarily by his own inclinations; and his Creator not be, at the ſame time, his ſovereign legiſlature and judge? and, as ſuch, he ſhall never manifeſt his favourable acceptance of the orderly, and his diſpleaſure at the diſorderly, behaviour of his ſubjects? No! if we would not contradict all the notions we have of the perfections of God, we muſt draw this infer-

ence from them: that it is an eſſential part of his government to bring to judgment ſuch creatures as we, and to reward or to puniſh them according to their conduct. If we caſt an eye on the fates of mortals here on earth, this concluſion will acquire a ſuperior degree of force. Can we behold the wiſe, the righteous, the virtuous, the upright votary of God and Chriſt, ſtruggling hard with miſery, and living in the utmoſt ſcorn, in the extremeſt poverty, in the ſevereſt bondage? Can we ſee him cruelly perſecuted on account of his integrity and piety, deſpoiled of his goods and his fame, enduring the moſt excruciating torments, and dying an ignominious and painful death? Can we, on the other hand, behold the fool, the diſhoneſt man, the bond-ſlave of vice, the imprudent ſcorner of God and Religion, paſſing his days in the moſt flouriſhing outward welfare, proſecuting unmoleſted his corrupt contrivances, gratifying his low deſires to the full

full extent of his wiſhes? Can we ſee him violently oppreſſing the moſt unſpotted innocence, ſullying the moſt beneficent virtue by malicious ſlanders, and perverting the laws of God and man? Can we, I ſay, ſee all this, and yet believe that the ſcene ends here? that this act of human life is both the firſt and the laſt? that the real temper and frame of the man ſhall never be brought to light? that the nobleſt virtues, on the one hand, and the moſt deteſtable vices on the other, are to remain in obſcurity for ever? No! God muſt not be the Holy One and the Juſt, as he actually is, on the ſuppoſition that he could equally approve, and regard with the ſame benignity, theſe tranſactions of men; if he require of them no account thereof; if he decree not, in another life, a different condition to the impious and pious, ſuited to their different conduct; if he makes not his judiciary ſentence public,

public, and ſo juſtify the meaſures of his government of mankind. This is the voice of reaſon. But ignorance and vice, wantonneſs and ſecurity, had weakened this voice, and had well-nigh put it to ſilence. The mercy of God cauſed it therefore to reſound afreſh to mankind by the Goſpel, and to addreſs them with more expreſſion and force than ever. The important doctrine of the future judgment is now ſet out of doubt. Every difficulty that might have been urged againſt it is now removed. It now repoſes on divine authority. It is now ſo plainly declared, that it is adapted to the meaneſt and loweſt capacities, and deprives us of all excuſe. Chriſt and his Apoſtles teach and aſſert it expreſſly in almoſt every page of the ſacred books. They ſay, "that God will bring to light the hidden things of darkneſs, and will make manifeſt the counſels of the hearts;" that "he will render to every man according to his deeds;"

that,

that, "to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory, and honour, and immortality, he will grant everlaſting life: but on them who obey not the truth, he will inflict indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh." And the Apoſtle Paul affirms, in our text, that "God has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained."

As certain is it likewiſe, ſecondly, that this judgment will be general, that it will extend to all the human race. It will, as our text declares, be held upon all the inhabitants of the earth. No one will be excepted out of it: thoſe who have died in all preceding times, as well as thoſe that ſhall then be found alive: the great and the mighty of the earth, who formerly were judges themſelves, and determined the fates of whole lands and nations; as well as the poor and abject, who depended

on

on their arbitration, and who were not unfrequently the unhappy victims of their perverted paſſions: the rich, who purchaſed honour and renown with their treaſures, and thus ſheltered themſelves from the reproaches of mankind; as well as the indigent, who were contemptible in their eyes by their outward condition, and expoſed to their malicious frowns: all theſe, without diſtinction of rank, of ſex or age, will appear before the Judge of the world; all theſe muſt deliver up an account of their paſt behaviour. "For He, which is Lord over all, ſhall fear no man's perſon, neither ſhall he ſtand in awe of any man's greatneſs; for he hath made the ſmall and great, and careth for all alike." He is the Creator and Ruler of all men; they are all his ſubjects. Their lives and their fortunes are all in his hands. No man can eſcape from his juriſdiction. No man can hide himſelf from the eyes of the Omniſcient. Here no art avails, no cunning, no authority, no oppoſition,

oppoſition, no violence. At his ſummons all muſt appear before his throne. At his nod all nature muſt obey. Hear how St. John deſcribes this awful ſcene, as he ſaw it depicted in a viſion: "I ſaw the dead," ſays he, "ſmall and great, ſtand before "God; and the books were opened. And "the ſea gave up the dead which were in "it; and death and the grave delivered "up the dead which were in them; and "they were judged every man according to "their works."

Every man according to his works! Righteouſneſs and equity then will give the decree in this ſolemn judgment. This is the third particular comprehended in our text. God, it tells us, will judge the world in righteouſneſs. The laws which have been delivered to mankind, by Nature and Revelation, will be the rule of their ſentence: by them will their conduct be examined, and their fates determined.

Only

Only real integrity and virtue will be approved and rewarded; only actual criminality and vice will be condemned and puniſhed. Here no deceit and no diſguiſe have place. Appearance, however great and impoſing, muſt here give way to truth. Here will the convenient maſk be ſnatched from the hypocrite and the deceiver, under which in this world they hid their hideous viſage; here the moſt illuſtrious birth, the higheſt rank, the greateſt power, the vaſteſt ſums of gold, will nought avail; here all outward diſtinctions, which may bias the judgments of this world, will be of no ſignificance; here will no evaſions, no excuſes, no palliations, be admitted, of intentional ſins and predominant depravity. The laws are clear; the judge is impartial, and regards not the perſons of men. The conduct of each individual preſents itſelf to him in the moſt perſpicuous light. He ſees it in all its extent, in all its motives and deſigns.

ſigns. He knows how to eſtimate the worth of each particular action with the niceſt preciſion, and to weigh the concomitant circumſtances together that may magnify or diminiſh it. He will hence judge each by the degree of capacities and powers he has vouchſafed him, by the meaſure of talents and advantages he has committed to him, by the greater or ſmaller light that has enlightened him, by the helps he has had, by the inſtruction he has received, by the connexions in which he has ſtood, by the ſtronger or weaker temptations he has had to overcome. To whom little was given, of him will but little be required; but to whom much was committed, of him will be aſked the more. By the light of Nature will the Heathen be judged; by the Revelation which God imparted to the fathers of the old œconomy will the Jews be tried: the Goſpel he has proclaimed to us by his ſon will be the rule with Chriſtians. Every one, as the Holy Scriptures repeatedly declare, will receive the things done

done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Thus ſhall the Judge of all the earth do right, and in righteouſneſs judge the nations. No one will have reaſon to complain of his ſentence; no one can ſay he has been dealt with unjuſtly, ſince the obſtinate ſinner will be condemned by his own conſcience. But the joyfulleſt praiſes of divine compaſſion will be heard from the mouths of the abſolved, becauſe the Lord has not dealt with them in the rigours of righteouſneſs, (for in that caſe who can ſtand in his ſight?) but according to the multitude of his mercies, and has accepted their ſincerity inſtead of actual perfection. What an animating conſolation for all true believers, for every upright worſhiper of God! They ſee the multiude and the enormity of their ſins; they feel their own unworthineſs; they know the defects and imperfection of their beſt qualities and virtues. They labour indeed with

with care at their improvement; but they cannot aſcend to the heights of holineſs they wiſh to reach, and which God may require them to attain. But they need not be diſmayed at this. They ſhall meet with grace for juſtice.

Of this we can the leſs doubt, if we turn our thoughts, fourthly, on the perſon whom God has ordained to the execution of this auguſt tranſaction. It is, as our text informs us, Chriſt, the ſon of man; Chriſt, who was born in our nature, and in it experienced all the troubles and hardſhips of life; Chriſt, who was tempted in all things like us, that he might be a merciful high-prieſt, and have compaſſion on our infirmities; Chriſt, who loved mankind to that degree, that he laid down his life for them, purchaſed them with his blood, and gave himſelf a ſacrifice for them. What a comfortable circumſtance for all his ſincere dependants and diſciples!

Their judge is their friend; he is their brother; he is their advocate, by whom they have acceſs to the Father. They ſtand in the moſt intimate and bleſſed relation to him. He has given them already the greateſt, he has already given them quite extraordinary and unexampled demonſtrations of his favour and protection; and ſuch as he once has loved, he loves even to the end. What then have they not to expect from him! What mildneſs, what indulgence, what pity, may they not hope for from him! To whom can they more contentedly entruſt their final diſpoſal and their ſalvation, than to him who has done and ſuffered ſo much for them, who died for them upon the croſs? But how tremendous, on the other hand, are theſe truths to all ſuch among Chriſtians as refuſe having fellowſhip with him, and do not obey the Goſpel! They will be judged by Chriſt; by Chriſt whom they deſpiſe, whoſe heavenly doctrine they deride,

deride, whoſe gracious invitations they reject; by Chriſt, whoſe divine authority they deny, to whom they refuſe all reverence and all obedience, whoſe commands they obſtinately oppoſe, whoſe empire they diſpute. What can they expect, but that he will ſay to them, "I never "knew you: depart from me, ye that "work iniquity?" He will then, as the Holy Scriptures expreſsly declare, "be re-"vealed from heaven with his mighty "angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance "on them that know not God, and that do "not obey his Goſpel." He will hurl them, as his foes, into the ſecond death. But, however great, however important theſe truths, however dreadful to the impenitent; yet are they no leſs certain and undeniable.

God, as our text affirms, has given us the moſt credible aſſurance of it, in that he has raiſed his Son from the dead. Hereby has God confirmed his doctrine in the

manner the moſt expreſs, and ſo as to place it beyond all doubt in the eyes of impartial judges. He has ſtamped it with the ſeal of truth. He has publickly and ſolemnly acknowledged him for his meſſenger, for his Son. Now may we ſafely truſt to the diſcoveries Chriſt has made us of the counſels of God, and of his deſigns upon mankind. Now may we confidently ſurrender ourſelves to the information he has given us in regard to our future expectations. Now have all his promiſes and threats received a heavenly ſanction; all his words will be infallibly fulfilled. As various therefore and incontrovertible as are the arguments whereon the certainty of his reſurrection reſts; ſo numerous and irrefragable are likewiſe the demonſtrations we have of the general judgement which he has announced and publiſhed to mankind in the name of the Moſt High. Hence it is, that the conduct of this grand event is repreſented in the Holy Books as

a part,

a part, or a conſequence, of the recompence our Saviour obtained as the accompliſhed mediator. Becauſe he humbled himſelf and became obedient unto death; therefore has God alſo highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that every knee ſhould bow before him, and every tongue confeſs his ſway. Becauſe, as the Son of Man, he vindicated the rights of God, aſſerted the ſanction of his laws, and evidenced all his perfections; therefore, the Father hath committed all judgement to him, that all men ſhould honour the Son, even as they honour the Father; and hath given him authority, to execute judgement alſo, becauſe he is the Son of Man. As ſurely, then, as God will keep his word, ſo ſurely will Chriſt adminiſter on that day the buſineſs of the office entruſted to him, as Judge both of the living and the dead.

What important doctrines! In what a close connexion they stand with our felicity! What a strong influence then ought they not to have on our whole behaviour? Oh, then, no longer resist their wholesome effects. Consider, how dreadful they are to sinners, how consoling to the pious; and follow the rules they prescribe for our observance, that they may turn to your comfort, and not to your dread.

Is there a day of judgment to come; then tremble, all you who forget your God, who have submitted to the service of unrighteousness and vice. Though you here may know how to evade the avenging judgment of the laws; though you here can conceal your corrupt designs, your shameful lusts, your unrighteous deeds, from the eyes of the world, and preserve the appearance of integrity; though the Lord is patient and long-suffering towards you: yet will he not so continue for

ever. This will all turn to your utter confuſion hereafter. Nothing will be able to ſhield you from the Almighty. Your crimes will all be revealed, and cover you with ſhame and horror. The divine compaſſion, which you have ſcorned, will make room for unrelenting juſtice; and you will not eſcape the puniſhment, the dreadful puniſhment, appointed for the hardened ſinner. Would you prevent this deplorable end; then conſider your ways, and turn to the Lord your God. Make haſte, and deliver your ſoul. Proſtrate yourſelf in humility and contrition at the feet of the Judge of the world. Strive to acquire his grace in Chriſt, without which you cannot ſubſiſt in his preſence. Fulfill the conditions on which he invites you to it. Strive, by a true repentance, by a lively faith, by an earneſt converſion, to become ſuſceptible of his acceptance. Abandon the ſervice of ſin; and employ your whole life in preparing for the eternity that ſtands

before you, and into which you may ſo ſoon, ſo ſuddenly be placed.

Is there a day of judgment to come; then rejoice, ye righteous, who ſerve your God with upright hearts, and walk in his ways. Rejoice even then when you are forced to paſs your days in obſcurity and indigence; when you endure deriſion, contempt, and perſecution; when you experience the moſt ſenſible adverſities, and the moſt grievous afflictions. All this will hereafter aſſume, to your comfort, another form. The virtues you have practiſed in concealment here, the generous actions you have performed in ſilence, will then be placed in the cleareſt light; they will be publickly declared, they will be crowned with the praiſe of all bleſſed ſpirits, with the approbation of God; your obſcurity will be changed into glory, your ſhame into honour, and your tears into tokens of joy. Your perſecutors and ſcorners will he aſhamed, and will envy your

your lot. This muſt alleviate to you all the ſorrows of time, and render them very tolerable. This muſt inſpire you with an invincible courage in them, and incite you to perſeverance in goodneſs. Continue with unabating ardour the courſe of virtue which is ſet before you. Its happy iſſue, and the immarceſſible crown of life, certainly merit all the care, all the induſtry, all the zeal, you are able to exert. They will amply repay you for all the difficulties you have met with, have joyfully overcome, and for your perſeverance to the end.

Is the future judgment general, will none be exempted from it; then ſhould this conſideration be an admonition to the powerful of the earth, that it is even their duty to deſcend from their thrones; to bow themſelves down in the duſt, before him who is the uncontrouled, the uncontroulable Lord of heaven and earth; to acknow-

ledge their weakneſs and their dependance on him, to implore grace of him who is their ſovereign as well as ours; and never to loſe ſight of that majeſtic ſcene, when all their mightineſs ſhall diſappear, and not only no longer ſtand them in any ſtead, but will render their juſtification a more arduous concern. This conſideration ſhould induce the rich of this world, never to truſt to their riches, to eſtimate their worth by their relation to that day, when they can deliver or profit no man; to lay up treaſures for the future ſtate, and as faithful ſtewards of the goods entruſted to them, that they may not find themſelves deſtitute, but be able to give up their accounts with joy. This conſideration ſhould likewiſe encourage the poor, the lowly, the oppreſſed and perſecuted, who are conſcious of an undiſſembled ſincerity before God, not to let their ſpirits fail, not to repent of their prudent choice, not to repine at their lot in grief and diſcontent; to raiſe themſelves above the preſent,

ſent, to comfort themſelves with the hopes of futurity, and in ſerenity of ſoul commit all things to him who judges right. This conſideration ſhould, in fine, excite us all, whether we fill high or humble ſtations among mankind, whether we be rich or poor, young or old, to ſerious and conſtant reflexion on our future reckoning, ſo to judge our views, endeavours, actions, pleaſures, and ſufferings, as we ſhall hereafter judge them; to deſpiſe and to condemn all that we ſhall then deſpiſe and condemn; and to approve of nothing, to eſteem nothing, to love nothing, and to do nothing, but what then will deſerve our approbation and praiſe, what will then bear and ſtand out the trial.

Will that judgment be executed in righteouſneſs; oh put not then your truſt in things that will avail you nothing. Truſt not in the outward diſtinctions which indeed may procure ſome reſpect among mankind,

mankind, but which then will afford you no relief, becauſe they have no intrinſic value. Be not ſatisfied with bearing the name of Chriſtians, and belonging to the people of God. Repoſe not in a mere knowledge of the truth, or in a barren and dead belief in the Saviour of the word. Depend not on the zeal with which you have adhered to this or that religious party, or on the juſt ideas you have formed of the dogmas of Chriſtianity, or on the punctual obſervance of the rites of worſhip it preſcribes. All this is inſufficient to effect your deliverance at that day. You muſt worthily employ the prerogatives with which you are adorned; and the power of the name you bear muſt be evinced by your conduct. Your knowledge muſt be lively; your faith muſt be active in love, and fruitful in good works; your zeal muſt be rational and pure; your piety unfeigned and ſincere; your orthodoxy in doctrine muſt be accompanied by integrity in manners, if you would have it to ſtand the teſt

of

of that awful judgment. Not opinions, not ceremonies, not outward diſtinctions, but the moral deportment of mankind, will there be the object of ſcrutiny; their views will be examined, their works will be judged. Strive then to experience the force of the Religion you profeſs. Live conſiſtently with your vocation; follow after "holineſs, without which, no man ſhall ſee the Lord." Be careful to fulfill the terms whereon you are offered the Goſpel of heavenly grace; and ſtrive after real perfection, if you would not be aſhamed, but joyful and bold, at the coming of the Lord.

Is it, laſtly, Chriſt, the Son of God, who is to hold and conduct this judgment; and has God ſet this great truth beyond all doubt, by his doctrine and his reſurrection from the dead; how will you eſcape, by what means will you make your excuſe, you who deſpiſe the Saviour and his ſalvation,

tion, you who reject his Goſpel in unbelief, who refuſe to live under his mild command, and to revere and obey him as he requires? You deſpiſe him who ſits on the right-hand of the Father, whom God has exalted to be Lord over all, whom he has ordained to be judge of the living and the dead. You reſiſt him who has power to bleſs and to condemn, who muſt reign till he has put "all enemies under his feet." You reject him who alone can deliver from the wrath to come, and beſides whom there is no Saviour. What perverſeneſs! what abſurdity! How will you bear the look of this majeſtic and offended judge? By what will you defend yourſelves againſt his fierce diſpleaſure? How will you vindicate your oppoſition to that brilliant light he cauſed to ſhine upon you, and your miſapplication of the means of grace he granted to your wants? Oh, proſtrate yourſelves, even now, before him; deplore your diſobedience to him with tears of deep

deep contrition; and yield him the reverence ſo juſtly his due! Even now, while grace is offered, ſeize it with repentant faith, devoutly accept his ſacred doctrine, chearfully ſubſcribe to his holy and excellent law, and make the obſervance of it your chief concern. So may you expect his coming without diſmay; ſo may you hope for it with complete aſſurance. You may, you muſt do ſo, Chriſtians, who deal ſincerely with your Saviour, who revere him as your Lord, and follow him as his diſciples. That day, which ſhall decide the fates of mortals, need give you no alarm. It will be a day of deliverance, a day of glory, a day of triumph to you. What unutterable ſentiments of joy and gratitude will take poſſeſſion of your ſouls, with what peace and comfort will you raiſe your heads, what gladſome ſounds of praiſe will you expreſs, when you diſcern your Saviour, whom you love at preſent, though you have not ſeen him, coming in the

the clouds of heaven! when you behold his majesty and power, when you hear the gracious word of absolution from his mouth, when he calls you to him, when you enter his kingdom with him, to dwell therein for ever!

O God, permit us not by our sins to lose this sovereign hope, to be excluded this exalted glory! Place thy judgment ever in our view; let the idea of it be the guide of our whole behaviour, and give us all to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling."

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

BRITISH MUSEUM 2 FE 78